

1 Corinthians 2:1-12; Psalm 112:1-9; Matthew 5:13-20
Reverend Giuseppe Mattei (February 8, 2026)

Going to mass on Sunday is an obligation in the Catholic Church. I remember hearing as a child about our duty to attend Sunday Mass from just about everyone, from my parents and grandparent to the sister teaching us the catechism, to the priest wagging his finger from the pulpit. Failing to fulfil that obligation was a grave sin.

But I never felt a sense of imposition. I enjoyed going to church and being with so many other kids. After I was confirmed, I stopped going to Mass for some time as the change from Middle to High School was a struggle for me, and I spent Sundays catching up on massive homework.

As I grew older and weekends got lighter with homework, I remember returning to my weekly routine of attending mass on Sunday and participating in youth activities during the week. But my participation at mass, though not forced, was one of the many things I did out of habit. It was a good habit but still only the right thing to do. It came automatically.

However, there was a certain uneasiness, almost a desire to rebel at the thought of having Ten Commandments to obey. At the time, I didn't know that the commandments God gave

were actually 613. If I had known, I probably would have choked. Ten were plenty enough.

Back then, I was concerned with Christian morality, wanting to be counted among the “good” Christians. I focused on duty and being found acceptable and likable. Keeping the Sabbath holy, as the 4th Commandment instructs, was easy and enjoyable to me. It was the other nine that scared me.

Then I heard from Jesus, whom I thought to be all about love and grace, and he is introduced in the gospel of Matthew as the new Moses, the Law Giver who hasn’t come to do away with the Law and the Prophets but wants to affirm them.

There is no escaping, Jesus says, for “not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.”¹ Go figure, I had thought that he came to do a new thing and do away with the tough and intransigent God of the Old Testament. I walked under that dark cloud for many years in my youth.

Then, it became clear that the Commandments are intended not to restrict individual activity or enthusiasm, but rather to safeguard and enrich life as a whole, extending beyond the individual to benefit the broader community. *God has the whole community in mind and at heart.* Respecting the Commandments means participating in the salvific plan of

¹ Matthew 5:18

God for all: a new reality, one based on respect for life, human dignity and justice as Peter explains,

God has promised us a new heaven and a new earth, where justice will rule. We are really looking forward to this! My friends, while you are waiting, you should make certain the Lord finds you pure, spotless, and living at peace. Don't forget that the Lord is patient because he wants people to be saved.²

I understood, then, that the Ten Commandments were not a burden to carry but a healthy structure to respect. In my eyes God transformed from a disciplinarian to a loving God. But more than that, God became *my* God who wanted an intimate relationship with me. In my personal prayer sitting by myself in an empty church for hours almost every week, I realized that, as St. Augustine wrote, God is closer to me than I am to myself.³ I basked in that realization. I found joy and went to mass not to satisfy my social need or moral quest but because I wanted to worship my heavenly Father!⁴

When I heard Jesus' announcement that we are salt of the earth and light of the world, I was eager to let the world know the majesty of the Lord and the plan of salvation for all people. I immediately felt the urge and attraction of the

² See 2 Peter 3:13 (Contemporary English Version)

³ See an explanation of this in [Why God Is 'Nearer to Us Than Our Innermost Being' - Catholic Exchange](#); see also Psalm 139 and Meister Eckhart [Poet Seers » Meister Eckhart](#)

⁴ See poem by Rabe'a al-'Adawiya cited in Ilia Delio, The Unbearable Wholeness of Being, p. 106

kingdom: a brotherhood and sisterhood of people showered with the blessing of this wisdom: we belong to God and God delights in us. I wanted to roam the world to let people in on the secret.

And yet, as I consider Jesus' characterization of a disciple, I know that at times I have lost my saltiness and hidden my light. I've not always kept the Ten Commandments in sight and have lost my way. I've not always behaved as a Christian, not always sought the greater good, not always spoken when I should have and not always forgiven as I have been. I've acted with pretense and I didn't know that I didn't know what I was doing. Yet, by the grace of God, here I am.⁵

God has been gracious to me, patient and forgiving. I wish I could undo and re-do some of my past choices. But I can only look forward and commit to remain faithful and share with you the wisdom and knowledge of Christ crucified: "love always, love often, love anyway."⁶

Writing to the Church in Corinth, Paul reminded them:

"When I came to you, brothers and sisters, [...] I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. My speech and my proclamation were made not with persuasive words of wisdom but with a demonstration

⁵ Not by my doing but God's, which I accept in humility: see Ephesians 2:8-9 and Titus 3:5

⁶ Minneapolis street memorial to ICE victim, Renee Good.

of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.”⁷

Thank God for that! The Spirit of God seeks fertile ground in both the speaker and the listener. In proclaiming the Word of salvation, the preacher, in all honesty and humility, gets out of the way allowing the Spirit to reach the congregation with the least interference possible. Yet the Spirit uses even human weakness to augment the power of God.

By the same token, the Spirit reaches those who listen with the least resistance in humility and eagerness, moving the hearer to a closer communion with God and other believers, creating opportunities for personal spiritual growth and social engagement. Neither the speaker nor the receiver knows how God is going to transform hearts and create an outcome. When the Spirit at work in the speaker and the Spirit at work in the receiver intersect, awesome insights may occur and life has the potential for great transformation.

Through God’s wisdom, the apostle Paul says, we have a better grasp of the heart and depth of God (1 Cor 2:6-12). And the Spirit’s influence will be shown through the qualities displayed: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Gal 5:22-23)

⁷ 1 Cor 2:1.4-5

So, Jesus reminds us of what we really are: salt of the earth, light of the world, and the Psalmist proclaims: “Light shines in the darkness for the upright; the righteous are merciful and full of compassion.” (Ps 112:4)

How are we called to be salt and light in society? Surely, we don't lack for situations begging for the spice of the Gospel. Will we advocate for meaningful reforms, for de-escalation of conflicts, for authorities and legislators to be kept honest, for institutions to be held accountable, for the rule of law to be respected, for a humane approach to immigration, for respect for life, and for true justice and peace in the world?

The Psalmist reflects on: [the righteous] will never be shaken...They will not be afraid of any evil rumors; their heart is steadfast, trusting in the LORD. (Psalm 112:6-7)

The world is in love with false gods. Let there be light! But how can we be light for the world if we ourselves are blind, if we ourselves fall for lies that confuse and lead astray, if we ourselves have forgotten the mercy with which we have been welcomed back, if we ourselves have lost touch with the love of the One who has given himself for us?

Listening to those in need draws us nearer to God and one another. Let us allow compassion to move our heart. Let us pray for God's Spirit to inspire us with wisdom and move us

closer to the One who is always near. Let us go be salt and light for all. Amen.