

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

John 8:12

R⁷. Alleluia, alleluia.

I am the light of the world, says the Lord;
whoever follows me will have the light of life.

R⁷. Alleluia, alleluia.



Gospel

Matt 5:13-16; L73A

Jesus said to his disciples:

“You are the salt of the earth.

**But if salt loses its taste, with what can
it be seasoned?**

**It is no longer good for anything
but to be thrown out and trampled
underfoot.**

You are the light of the world.

**A city set on a mountain cannot be
hidden.**

**Nor do they light a lamp and then put it
under a bushel basket;
it is set on a lampstand,
where it gives light to all in the
house.**

**Just so, your light must shine before
others,**

**that they may see your good deeds
and glorify your heavenly Father.”**

Reflecting on the Gospel

Before the days of well-stocked supermarket shelves, salt was an expensive and coveted commodity. It was the one thing that couldn't be grown or produced locally; it had to be bought. Salt does more than make foods tastier. It is a preservative, very necessary before the age of electricity, refrigerators, and freezers. It is an essential nutrient for the body. In times gone by, salt licks were natural deposits of salt where wild animals would instinctively gather and so salt licks became natural hunting grounds for humans.

Before the days of widespread electricity and the lightbulb, dispelling darkness was limited and limiting. Poor people who could not afford candles, oil for lamps, or even firewood for a fire would go to bed with sundown and darkness. For those who could afford oil for one lamp or a single candle, the light emitted was rather dim, adequate only to see large objects unless one was very close to the source of light.

Jesus uses salt and light, two things common and necessary for enhanced life, to describe the essential gifts discipleship brings to the world. Disciples are to be salt and light for others. In this gospel Jesus calls us to assess whether our discipleship has lost its potency because our salt has become flat and our light has become dim. The good news is that no matter how bland or dim our discipleship, Christ never throws us out, tramples us underfoot, or hides us. Here is the twist of the gospel: Jesus calls disciples to be “the salt of the earth” and the “light of the world,” yet to be such, Christ must first be *our* salt and light. We need first to encounter Christ who always remains with us, making it possible for us to mature in our discipleship.

We can be faithful disciples—salt that seasons others in Gospel living, and light that dispels the darkness of uncertainty and lack of clear direction—when, as the disciples in the gospel, we listen to Jesus and allow him to guide us. To be fruitful disciples, the first relationship we must foster is with Jesus. This relationship ensures that we are not just any salt or any light, but that of Christ. Disciples do not act alone, but are always instruments in God's hand who, through God's power acting in them, do good for others. We are the salt licks attracting others to Christ; we are the light that makes clear for others the way to Christ.

Living the Paschal Mystery

While the gospel uses metaphors to help us understand who we are as disciples of Jesus, this is not simply pretty language that may give us a poetic thrill but then be forgotten. The first reading makes very concrete the gospel metaphors. We are vindicated when we act decisively as God acts: we are to feed the hungry, “shelter the oppressed and the homeless,” “clothe the naked,” remove oppression and refrain from “malicious speech.” Practically speaking for us today, this might mean that we get involved in some of the parish ministries directed to social outreach; or we might tutor one of the schoolchildren. Maybe being Christ-salty or Christ-shining simply means that we take stock of our already too-busy days and reflect on what has value or meaning for the good of others and what has become habit to no real avail. Discipleship always involves ongoing discernment about how we are in relation to God and others. Anything short of being the best person we can be as God's instruments of salvation is selling short being true to ourselves.