

**SPIRITUALITY**

**GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

John 8:12

R/. Alleluia, alleluia.

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

R/. 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.

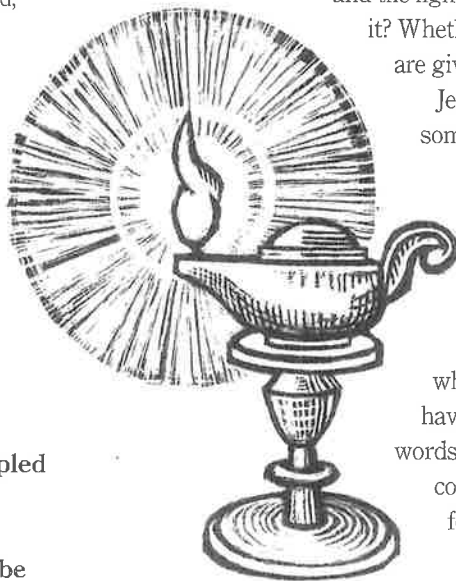
A city set on a mountain cannot be  
hidden.

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**

The gospel opens with the words “Jesus said to his disciples,” thus giving us not only an account of something two thousand years ago, but something that is addressed to us today. There are two “you are” statements that cannot be missed. The metaphors are simple but sublime: “salt” and “light.”

Jesus is telling his disciples as he tells us that we are the salt for the earth and the light of the world. What an impressive moniker! Are we up to it? Whether or not we deem the terms appropriate appellations, we are given those names nonetheless.

Jesus continues the metaphor in each case, spelling out some implications. With respect to salt, today we do not experience it losing its flavor. Scientifically speaking, sodium chloride is extremely stable. But in the ancient world, people were not buying table salt in convenient packaging at the grocery store. Instead, salt came from natural sources and its chemical composition included more than merely sodium chloride, which when exposed to water (rain, humidity, condensation) would have been removed, leaving only the crude remains. In other words, salt in antiquity was impure; in certain circumstances it could seem like it lost its taste. At that point it was not good for anything.

About light, this, too, is expressed in the ancient imagery of bushel baskets and lampstands. Of course, in antiquity a lamp would have meant burning oil, thus “light a lamp.” Still the meaning of the metaphor is clear. Disciples are the light of the world. Their good deeds—that is, clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, and giving drink to the thirsty—should be seen by others. We disciples are not to do these good deeds for the sole purpose of being seen, but the deeds are to be done before others.

Even now, we consider an exemplar of this gospel passage to be someone like St. Mother Teresa, whose good deeds were seen by others who in turn gave glory to God. Mother Teresa was not doing this for her own benefit. She was motivated by love; she was a “light of the world.” We, too, are called to be salt for the earth, the light of the world, performing deeds of justice and mercy, for we are disciples of Jesus. His words to the disciples are addressed to us.

**Living the Paschal Mystery**

Oftentimes it can be easy to read gospel stories of Jesus and the disciples without recognizing that we are disciples too. When Jesus speaks to his disciples, he is speaking to us. One prayer that is particularly apropos in this gospel is to exchange one’s own name for “his disciples.” So instead of reading, “Jesus said to his disciples,” we read, “Jesus said to Kelly” or “Jesus said to Greg.” Reading that passage over to oneself several times, replacing the text in this way, can give the gospel new meaning.

Essentially, we are Jesus’ disciples and the words to his disciples apply equally to us. We are invited to be part of the paschal mystery with Christ. Let us journey with him and his disciples, learning from the ultimate teacher, whose destiny is known.

### **Focusing the Gospel**

**Key words and phrases:** “[Y]our light must shine before others.”

**To the point:** In today’s gospel Jesus instructs the disciples, “[Y]our light must shine before others, / so that they may see your good deeds / and glorify your heavenly Father.” Jesus’ words are curious here. In this same Sermon on the Mount, Jesus will tell us, “Take care not to perform righteous deeds / in order that people may see them” (Matt 6:1; NABRE). We will read these words in a few weeks’ time on Ash Wednesday. How do we reconcile these seemingly contradictory messages? Perhaps the key is the motivation for the deeds that make up a Christian life. They are not to be done for one’s own glory or benefit, but instead to give all glory and honor to God through a life of loving service to others.

### **Connecting the Gospel**

**to the first reading:** Jesus calls his disciples to be “the light of the world.”

In the first reading from Isaiah, we hear of exactly how this light will shine for the glory of the Lord when we feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, clothe the naked, and treat our brothers and sisters with compassion.

**to experience:** Of the many hallmarks of the saints, one seems to be a dedication to good works that naturally draw attention coupled with a desire to escape attention to oneself completely. During her acceptance speech for the 1979 Nobel Peace Prize, Mother Teresa said, “I personally am most unworthy . . . But I am grateful and very happy to receive [this award] in the name of the hungry, of the naked, of the homeless, of the crippled, of the blind, of the leprous, of all those people who feel unwanted.” As disciples of Christ, we are called to a high standard—not only to do good works, but to do them selflessly as well.

### **Connecting the Responsorial Psalm**

**to the readings:** To the imagery of light found in both the first reading and the gospel, the psalmist also highlights the firm foundation of the just. We are told that the upright one “shall never be moved” and that his heart is “firm” and “steadfast.” In the gospel reading Jesus likens his disciples to a city on a hill that “cannot be hidden.” The psalmist’s characterization of the just one leads to another image; like a lighthouse “the just man is a light in darkness.”

**to psalmist preparation:** Who has been an example of faith and a guiding light for you in times of darkness? How are you being called to be this light for others?

### **PROMPTS FOR FAITH-SHARING**

The prophet Isaiah tells us it is only in works of mercy (feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked) that our light will shine before others. When have you personally experienced works of mercy bringing “light” to your life or the lives of others?

St. Paul writes to the Corinthians, “I resolved to know nothing . . . except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” What do these words mean to you?

In each of our lives, we have been given talents and abilities to use for the good of others. Is there a gift you have been hiding under a bushel basket, either consciously or unconsciously?

Often we hear the image of “light” in the Bible, but less so, salt. What do you think Jesus is implying about the spiritual life in calling for his disciples to be “salt of the earth”?