

July 12, 2018

Greetings to all the Faithful of St. Andrew's,

Christ is among us!

The Gospel reading for this Sunday is taken from Matthew 5. This chapter is part of a larger section called the "Sermon on the Mount" which encompasses chapters 5-7. These chapters define what citizenship in God's kingdom looks like.

In chapter 5 our Lord challenges his disciples to be "salt" and "light" in the world. Salt is a preservative but also, according to the Law, it makes offerings to God acceptable (e.g. Lev. 2:13; Num. 18:19; 2 Chron. 13:5; Ezek. 43:24). If a disciple is not acting as salt, i.e. acting as a true disciple, then that disciple is "no longer good for anything" (Matt. 5:13). Discipleship in this world is an offering and sacrifice to the glory of God. The Apostle Paul writes the following words in the book of Romans "But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit" (15:15-16).

Disciples are also called to be "the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14). Light of course dispels darkness, so as to prevent one from stumbling over what would otherwise be unseen. This idea also refers to shining a light on God, so to say. Here God is the focus, not ourselves. Matthew 5:14-16 reads as follows: "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

This light of the Gospel may be too uncomfortable for many. When seeing God, we see ourselves, which is a very frightening experience. In fact, before calling his disciples to be "salt" and "light," Jesus prepared them by saying, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matt. 5:10-12).

Salt is a preservative as well as an aspect of offering and sacrifice to God for the benefit of others. It is also true, however, that if applied to a wound, salt causes discomfort like an unpleasant but necessary medicine applied to a wound. Light, too, which is meant for the benefit of human beings, can cause pain to the eyes. It takes a while for the eyes to adjust when one is in a dark room and then suddenly the light is turned on. Most of us accept this discomfort because we know that in time our eyes will adjust and the pain will pass. When it comes to discipleship, however, an even greater commitment to change is required: after hearing God's teaching, a disciple must put it into practice, teach others to do the same, and avoid the pitfall of hypocrisy.

Citizenship in God's kingdom requires words and deeds, faith and works. The Epistle of James puts it this way: "For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead" (James 2:26). In this activity of being salt and light we benefit others and shine the spotlight on God's greatness as we invite others also to live in this same light of God's kingdom. God is the focus, not ourselves. Salt dissolves but does not lose its taste, and light shows the way while it itself is unseen.

Yours in Christ,

Fr. Herman