

The disciple is the salt and the light of the world

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*  <https://doi.org/10.54855/csl.22243>

Received: 01/07/2022

Revision: 22/07/2022

Accepted: 23/07/2022

Online: 29/07/2022

Abstract

The text defines the nature and mission of a disciple of Jesus. In it, the disciple is likened to salt to make life saltier and a light to shine into the darkness of this world. When he understands his role and responsibility, the disciple will be more confident in his life of faith and his life of witness to everyone. From there, the mission entrusted by Jesus will be powerfully realized in the life of Christians in this day and age.

Keywords: Sermon, salt, light, parable

You are the salt of the earth. But if the 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.

Text¹: Mt 5, 13-16

Background

The evangelist Matthew arranged what Jesus taught (Mt 5:3-7, 27) into the Sermon inaugurating the Kingdom of Heaven, also known as the Sermon on the Mount. In it, the verses of the Gospel passage of Mt 5, 13 - 16 are in the section about the spirit of living the faith of the citizens of the Kingdom (Mt 5, 3 - 48)². This passage of the Gospel follows Jesus' discourse on the Beatitudes to his disciples (Mt 5:1-12). It immediately follows this passage about Jesus' fulfillment of the Mosaic law and new righteousness (Mt 5:1-12). Mt 5:17 - 37). The text of Mt 5, 13 - 15 is an expression of the Matthew formula found in the Synoptic tradition (Mk 9, 49-50 and Lk 14:34-35 when it comes to salt; Mk 4:21). And Lk

¹ *The New American Bible*, Revised Edition, Catholic Book Publishing Corp., N.J., 2011.

² Vũ Phan Long OFM, *Các bài Tin Mừng Mát-thêu dùng trong Phụng vụ*, Nxb Tôn Giáo, Hà Nội, 2007, 107.

8:16 when it comes to light)³. The passage of Matthew 5, 13 – 16 begins with Jesus' teaching about the mission and vocation of the disciples in this world: to be salt and light for the world. Concluding the passage, Jesus invites his disciples to live as witnesses so that everyone may know and glorify God the Father who is in heaven.

Paragraph layout

Part one: Parables: "salt" and parables of salt (Mt 5:13).

Part two: The "light" metaphor and the lamp parable (Mt 5, 14-15).

Conclusion: The witness of the disciple is to glorify God the Father (Mt 5:16).

Summary

The text defines the nature and mission of a disciple of Jesus. In it, the disciple is likened to salt to make life saltier and a light to shine into the darkness of this world. When he understands his role and responsibility, the disciple will be more confident in his life of faith and his life of witness to everyone. From there, the mission entrusted by Jesus will be powerfully realized in the life of Christians in this day and age.

Analysis and Annotation

"Brothers": This word appears five times in the text. So who is Jesus talking about here by the phrase "brothers"? Perhaps it is easy to see that Jesus is talking about the disciples. He meant that the disciples, who were chosen, were to be the ones to transform and reform this world.⁴ At the same time, the "brothers" here are all those who believe in Jesus, especially in relation to the Sermon on the Beatitudes at Mt 5:1-12, "brothers" are anyone who tries to live one of the Eight Beatitudes. We can also call them disciples because they lived according to the beatitudes outlined by Jesus.

"Salt": People immediately think of the salty taste when talking about salt. It is something indispensable in life. It is because of the salty taste that salt has the following uses: making food taste better (G 6, 6); used to preserve food, and preventing or retarding decay (Br 6:27)⁵, so salt refers to the enduring character of a "salt covenant," that is, an eternal covenant (Num 18, 9; Lv 2, 13; 2 Sbn 13, 5); used to make the soil fertile, mixed with the fertilizer of course (Lk 14:35); and salt is also used to treat diseases: applied to tendons, sprains; Antiseptic salt, to help digestion, to store and transmit Iodine, to prevent disease... The reason why salt has so many uses, as above, is that it is salty. If salt loses its "salty" taste, that is, it loses its essence, use, and purpose, then it becomes useless.

"Light": When people speak of light, people immediately think of life. "Life is light" (John 1:3). We can affirm: If there is no light, there is no life. Since there is no light, there will be

³ Daniel J. Harrington SJ, *The Gospel of Matthew*, USA, 1991, 83.

⁴ Vũ Phan Long OFM, *Các bài Tin Mừng Mát-thêu dùng trong Phụng vụ*, Nxb Tôn Giáo, Hà Nội, 2007, 107.

⁵ Daniel J. Harrington SJ, *The Gospel of Matthew*, USA, 1991, 80.

no photosynthesis of chlorophyll in plants, so there cannot be any biological or human life. Light is used as a symbol in the Bible. The prophet Isaiah likened the proclaimed Servant of Yahweh to "the light of the nations" (Is 49, 6); Israel must also be a light to the Gentiles (Is 42:6)⁶. The New Testament affirmed that Jesus is "the light of the world" (Lk 2:32; Jn 8, 12; 12, 35). And following his example, the disciples were to become the light of humanity (Eph 5:8-14)⁷.

"City built on the mountain": If this is mentioned in Is 2, 2-5, it refers to Jerusalem built on Mount Zion. Perhaps Jesus was referring to the holy city of Jerusalem, which is located on a mountain and can be seen from a great distance.⁸ Citadel here also means that the Church is built on the faith life of the Apostles to proclaim the Good News to everyone⁹. And the city can also be the very faith of the disciples of Jesus so that through his life of witness, the disciple spreads to everyone to be known to God.

"Light up": The lamp only illuminates when it is lit; otherwise, it is still lying alone in the corner of the house. The lamp is only lit when there is darkness, to shine a light for everyone to see everything. Jesus wants his disciples to "light up the lamp" of their faith through their own lives, to dispel the darkness of fear and sin, and to bear witness to their faith life. Do not "light the lamp" and then "put it under the bucket", but must "put it on the base" so that the light of the lamp of faith is "shining for everyone in the house", that is, for the whole world¹⁰.

"Let your light shine": Here refers to the purpose and life of the disciple. The disciple received light from Jesus, and now they radiate that light to everyone. The disciple cannot hide the light of faith to himself, nor can he live contrary to the values of the Gospel. The disciple must share the light with others.

"Glorify your Father": A very meaningful conclusion, it says, the One that everyone must turn to, to honor, is "your Father", who is in heaven. This expression is a prominent feature in Matthew, and it is also found only once in Mark and Luke¹¹. This is the first time in the Gospel of Matthew that Jesus talks about the Father. He even emphasizes that it is "your Father". This revelation also helps us to know that God is Triune.

Theological reflection

First of all, the disciple himself must have a quality, and it is like salt with a salty taste. The taste of salt is what lies most deeply in the grain of salt, and it belongs to the grain of salt. That quality of a disciple must have is cohesion. To have Jesus in them must be their nature. Second, the disciple lives in the world to transform it, to give it flavor, so as not to be

⁶ Daniel J. Harrington SJ, *The Gospel of Matthew*, USA, 1991, 80.

⁷ Hoàng Đắc Ánh OP, *Tin Mừng theo thánh Mát-thêu*, Sài Gòn, 1997, 79.

⁸ Daniel J. Harrington SJ, *The Gospel of Matthew*, USA, 1991, 80.

⁹ Etienne Charpentier (Mai Văn Hùng OP chuyên dịch), *Đọc Tin Mừng Theo Thánh Mát-thêu*, 1993, 62.

¹⁰ Manlio Simonetti, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture – New Testament Ia*, Illinois, USA, 2001, 94

¹¹ W.F.Albright and C.S.Mann, *The Anchor Bible Matthew*, New York, 1986, 56.

spoiled by the many attacks of Satan, the world, and the flesh. In other words, the disciple must live witness in the midst of this life in order to make the world better, better forever (Mt 5:13)¹². At the same time, salt is not a pearl, a bar of silver that must be stored or given to make a profit, but a spice. It takes effect when it accepts "self-destruct", dissolving into food. The Christian is the salt of the world because he is not called to a life of isolation, away from others, but because he knows how to dissolve himself into the great human family to support anyone who needs¹³.

Jesus also wants the disciple to shine his light. So what to shine? It is the shining of Jesus himself for humanity to know Him and to know God the Father. The disciple must shine Him for this world so that He can enter every human heart. Wherever He is, there is divine life¹⁴. That is the nature of light for the world. The two images "the city built on the mountain" and the "lamp for all in the house" (Mt 5, 14-15) can also be applied to individual disciples. By vocation, the disciple must share the light with others. They must not lack light, and even less irresponsibly because they cannot make a good influence in the community. This light is not the light of words, nor the light of theoretical truth, but the light of "good works", as Jesus mentioned (Mt 4:23-25) and did (Mt 5:3-11) and will still mention (Mt 7:23; 25, 31-46) in his discourses.

When a disciple has lived the true nature of being a disciple of Jesus: "salt" and "light" for the world, then they have also become witnesses of God's love for man. At the same time, the disciple's good conduct through his life, conduct, and love of concern for everyone is intended to "glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Mt 5:16), rather than looking for praise for themselves. Only when a disciple knows how to commit himself with a self-sacrificing love of service like Jesus will the human race realize that God is the disciple's loving and benevolent Father. Only kindness, kindness, love, and service spirit can become light for others.

In today's life, with the challenges facing the Church, especially for the faithful, the Lord's disciples, it is necessary to know how to live witness with steadfast faith, love, and compassion. When people learn to forgive, they are creating a peaceful and happy life for the world. More than anyone else, the faithful disciples of Jesus, the clergy and religious, must bear witness in the midst of today's world. In the face of injustices, sufferings, and wounds that people today are struggling with, struggling in pain, consecrated people must be "salt" to ease the pain and make their lives less painful, less humiliating, and help them live with dignity as children of God. Not only that, through lifestyle, through gratuitous love and service, through the very choices to side with the weak and abandoned people of the society is also the way to shine the light on those consecrated to this world. And most of all, with the strength of unwavering faith in God, consecrated persons come to meet to lift up lives engulfed in the darkness of sin, to help them walk in the light and love of God.

¹² Hoàng Đắc Ánh OP, *Tin Mừng theo thánh Mát-thêu*, Sài Gòn, 2004, 100.

¹³ Vũ Phan Long OFM, *Các bài Tin Mừng Mát-thêu dùng trong Phụng vụ*, Nxb Tôn Giáo, Hà Nội, 2007, 112.

¹⁴ Manlio Simonetti, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture – New Testament Ia*, Illinois, USA, 2001, 93

Through all of that, Jesus wants to continue the call not only to the disciples of old but to each one of us today.

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Biodata

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