

In the cold mountainous regions of North India where it is very cold, travellers are helped to keep warm in this way. They take a small vessel, put burning coal in it, and then cover it up. They weave strings around it and then, wrapping it with cloth, carry it under their arms.

Three men are traveling in this manner toward the sacred place of the Temple. On the way to the Temple, one of the men sees many others suffering from the cold and, taking the fire out of his vessel, he lights a fire so that everyone can get warm. The comfort of the fire keeps everyone alive. When they have to walk in the dark, the second man of the party takes out the fire in his vessel and lights a torch with it, which helps them all to walk along in safety.

The third man of the party mocks them and says, "*You are fools. You have wasted your fire for the sake of others.*" "*So show us your fire,*" the two other men say to him. When the third man opens up his vessel there is no fire, only cold ashes.

The fire of the first man has given warmth and comfort which allows many people to live. The second man has given light for a torch and they are able to arrive safely. But the third man is selfish and having kept the fire to himself, he now finds that it is of no use to anyone, not even himself.

There may be times we hear people say: "*Religion is a private affair*" or "*My faith is a matter between God and me.*" or "*I can pray in my room, therefore, I don't need to go to church.*" It is easy to let our faith be private or be in the comfort and safety of one's room. But that can be a selfish thing, because it means we are keeping our faith to ourselves.

That is the opposite of what Jesus is telling His Apostles. He tells the Apostles that *they are the salt of the earth* and, therefore, they must *give witness to their faith to the world*. In the story, the first man is the salt of the earth when he lights a fire so that everyone can get warm. He is sharing his fire with others.

Jesus further warns them against restricting their light to private use and urges instead that it be allowed to beam out to others. Again, in the story the second man is a light to the others in the group by lighting his torch so they can see where they are

walking. Jesus tells the Apostles that *they* are the light of the world and He warns them not to hide their light under a bushel basket. It is not so easy to let our Catholic faith shine in our world. But that is where it is most needed.

In today's Gospel, Jesus' Sermon on the Mount from St. Matthew's Gospel continues. Jesus does not say to the Apostles that they are not to "*become*" but that they "*are salt*", they "*are light*." Jesus does not tell us to *become* the world's light, any more than He tells us to *become* its salt. *We are salt and light already*. Jesus calls us to live in accordance with what we *already are*.

Salt purifies, seasons, and preserves. This describes the first four beatitudes: *poor in spirit, mourning, being meek, and desiring justice*. This is the interior life of the true follower of Jesus. Without this, life loses its taste and "*is no longer good for anything but is thrown out and trampled underfoot*."

Light removes darkness, attracts and shows the way. The last four Beatitudes are this light: *showing mercy, being pure in heart, reconciling to peace, witnessing and suffering*. These qualities show externally what the true interior life of the true follower of Jesus is. They light up people's lives in the virtues of Christ. Jesus concludes by saying to us, "*let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven*."

The first image of being the light of Christ began for us at our Baptism. The priest held up a candle and said to our parents and Godparents, "*Receive the Light of Christ*." Then the priest instructed them saying, "*This light is entrusted to you to be kept burning brightly and he/she is to walk always as a child of the light. Keep the flame of faith alive in his/her heart always*."

If our light we received at our Baptism is dimmed or hidden through sin, what hope has the world today of seeing Christ in us? However, we can restore the Light of Christ in us by repenting of our sins and going to Confession.

The First Reading tells us how we can be a light to the world by sharing our bread with the hungry, by clothing the naked, by not turning our back on any human need, by removing oppression, malicious speech and gossip. These are all concrete ways in which we flavour the earth with God's goodness, and allow light to break forth in darkness.

We are called not to be merely a tiny, flickering flame but a bright beacon that penetrates and searches out those who are lost. There are many people in the world who are in darkness and we may be the only beacon of light to guide them safely to the shores of the Church and to lead them to glorify their heavenly Father.

We are called to follow the teachings and the examples of Jesus by offering His Light He gave us to others. If our heart is filled with the Light of Christ, our words will be filled with His Light and our deeds and actions will be filled with His Light and zeal burning in us.

We realize that following Christ is not always easy. We are being asked to make some hard choices between good and evil, between personal comfort and serving, between popularity and principle, and between Christ and worldly values. Jesus' metaphors do not have to frighten us. We are not required to be a giant pillar of salt, or a strobe light on an airfield.

Each of us has the opportunity to glorify God according to our gifts, our circumstances and our state in life. So even if all we can offer is a grain of salt, or a flicker of a match light, that is okay. Whatever we have been given by God is meant to be shared for the sake of the world. Whatever we have is worth giving.

We have something the world desperately needs, that is, the Light of Christ, even though the world may not always welcome it. As Christ's disciples, we are to live and practice the Beatitudes. Jesus taught us so that we can more effectively be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Yes, being a true follower of Christ is not easy, but in the end, all of us who *are* the "salt of the earth" and who *are* "the light of world" know that we can make a difference. May we be salt so that others will thirst for Christ and may we reflect the light of our faith to one another by living peacefully and lovingly with one another, while at the same time giving honour and glory to God the Father.

May Our Lord grant you, as Saint Paul says, *so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God*, that we may be salt for the earth and light for the world.