

Sermon on the Mount

Oil & Wick

Matthew 5:14 - 16

Last week we reflected on what it meant to be the “salt of the earth”. As salt, we positively impact everything around us when we integrate our Christian values into all we say and do. People notice. Our “salt”, then, is reflected in how we conduct ourselves in the world; our “light”, the focus of this week’s reflection, shines as others see our actions and feel their impact.

You are the light of the world... In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

(Matthew 5:14-16)

So, what does it mean to be “the light of the world”? At our Baptism, we receive the light of Christ - we become the lamp that carries the light of Christ into the world. Our work as disciples is to make sure our lamp is well maintained so that the light can shine clear and bright. A lamp has two essential components: the oil and the wick. The oil – prayer – must be constantly replenished or our lamp will go out. Praying regularly is one of the habits of discipleship which keeps us connected to our eternal source of light – Christ.

The second essential part of a lamp is the wick. The wick is the way the oil is drawn out of the lamp so that it can burn and give light. If prayer is the oil, then the wick is those characteristics that enable us to live out the will of God as described in the Beatitudes. In other words, with the help of prayer, we strive to be poor in spirit, merciful, meek, a peacemaker, pure in heart, and so on.

As light-bearers, the light we shine falls on those around us. Everything we do - our words, thoughts, and actions - have either a positive (i.e., light) or negative (i.e., darkness) impact, whether we realize it or not. Disciples, by living the Christian virtues, offer the world a different kind of life, one filled with kindness, compassion, peace, love, and joy. The Christ-light we shine illuminates to others that there is another kind of life that is possible and offers a path to that fuller life.

We don't have any control where our light falls - that is the Holy Spirit's work. *Our* work is about how our light shines, ensuring our oil is stocked and wick is trimmed. In other words, praying regularly and striving to live the Beatitudes helps us shine Christ’s light purely and brightly. Often this light is expressed through practical, visible deeds of compassion; other times in less visible ways through prayer and loving presence. Regardless of how the light shines, in all these ways we give glory to God for our actions embody the good news of His love.

By living the Beatitudes, we embrace our blessedness. Being salt of the earth, we serve the world. As light of the world, we give God all glory and praise.

Reflection Question: In what ways are you maintaining your lamp?