

**YOU ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD - Biblical commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM**

**Matthew 5,13-16**

*You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.*

*“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.*

The new relationship between mankind and God, that Jesus had come to propose, could not be contained in Moses’ old alliance, Jesus needed to propose a new one and had formulated, in Matthew’s gospel, the beatitudes. At the conclusion of the beatitudes, here are the severe and also hopeful and confident words of Jesus, towards his disciples: *“You are the salt of the earth.”*

What is the meaning of the salt? In the culture of that time salt was and very precious element. We know that the word “salary” comes from salt, with which the soldiers were paid.

Salt served also for conserving food and from this very important material meaning, it was transformed into a symbolic meaning. Therefore, salt being that which conserves, it was given a figurative value, for example that of making a contract actual, real and everlasting. So once a contract was agreed and signed salt was sprinkled over it or over the hands, meaning that this contract was valued “for always.”

So, Jesus after proclaiming the beatitudes, says to his disciples *“You are the salt of the earth.”* Meaning, remaining faithful to his program, they made it actual.

But Jesus, follows with a warning: *“ But if the salt loses its saltiness,”* It is like someone that listens to Jesus’ words, but does not put them into practice. So Jesus warns his disciples, after the beatitudes: if you, listen and accept these beatitudes, but do not put them into practice, you are like salt without a taste.

What is it that will make it taste again? It is impossible. And here Jesus’ severe warning: *“ It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.”* Mankind awaited from your community the response to God, to the needs, and sufferings of humanity, but if you, who have been the recipients of this message, have heard it, then not practicing it or worse, you are ,with your behaviour, a contradiction to the message you believe in, Jesus says, you deserve the contempt of the people and deserve to be thrown away.

Now, the positive side: *“You are the light of the world.”*

Jesus says that his disciples, that by accepting the beatitudes they are the light that shines in the world and *“A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.”*

This city that is on a mountain, that was the light of the world, in the culture of the time, was Jerusalem, the city of God. With Jesus a city, a sanctuary where the people must go do not exist anymore, but there is a community that must take the light to where there is darkness.

And Jesus continues: *“Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl.”* Jesus is saying that this lamp is not put under a bowl, so that the light distinguishes, but *“ Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.”* Therefore Jesus is showing that you are light of the world through the generous gift of life, of what you are and what you do, confirming the invitation he had made at the beginning of Chapter 5 of Matthew, with the proposal to welcome the first beatitude.

Jesus continues: *“...let your light shine before others,”* it is not Jesus' light anymore, it is the peoples light. Jesus asks all to be “splendid” people, through the act of generosity, that is fruit of faith to the beatitudes. When we say a person is good, we use the expression: he is splendid. What does it mean? That the person gives off light.

So, Jesus asks to the community that *“...let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds..* “there connection between "your light" and "your work": the light is on good works, from the communication of life, by giving life to others.

*“..and glorify..* “ and here the evangelist says *“..your Father..”* because then, in the controversy with the Pharisees, Jesus will say to beware of these pious and religious people, who perform their works to be seen by people. No, Jesus says: people, seeing your good works, give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

It is the first time that, in Matthew's gospel, the word Father appears. Father will be God's name inside the Christian community. Father in the culture of that time was he who communicated life, through the communication of life to others, through the gift of oneself, of what one is and what one does, manifests the presence of God to ' the interior of the community and society.