

Sermon—6th Sunday After Pentecost
St George Orthodox Church—Albany, NY
Fr John Vazquez
7.16.23

Mt 5.14-19

The Lord said to his disciples, "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. Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

In the name of the F, S, HS—one God—Amen!

Christ is in our midst!

A little while ago I was having trouble making a very important decision.

Now, you know when you have trouble making a decision it can be very difficult.

When we have trouble making a decision we seek advice from those older and wiser than us

We might ask our friends for their input

Hopefully we pray about it

It can feel like we are in the dark

The way forward is very unclear and we are just looking for any little bit of light so that we can make a good decision.

In my case, after deliberating and struggling to come a decision the sunshine of clarity finally shone inside me and I could see clearly that yes, ketchup on my cheesy potatoes was the right decision....

Now, even though putting ketchup on my cheesy potatoes is not an important decision there are moments in our lives where we do need to make important decisions,

Where we do need guidance and prayer and where we do need to check in with those around us who have more experience and wisdom.

And when we do find that guidance and that sunshine of clarity shines for us we feel peace and relief like a cool wind on a hot day.

So we know and have experience with how important light is for our lives

We know that we cannot survive without light

Reflect for just a moment how light manifests itself your life...

We know that driving on the right side of the road is exponentially safer than driving on the left side...we have clarity about this—we are enlightened

We know that jumping off the top of a roof is not safe so we dont do that if we dont want to break any bones—we are enlightened

And we know that putting our hand in fire is not safe so we dont do that if we want to keep from getting burned—we are enlightened

What about when it comes to decisions that we make in our lives that aren't in this physical realm?

Well it would seem that if there are laws that we can follow in the physical realm there are laws that we can follow in the Spiritual realm as well.

Most of us are familiar with the story of when Moses goes up on mount Sinai to receive the Law from God. (Ex 24 and 34)

The Israelites had just escaped from the Egyptians and then they camp at the base of Mount Sinai.

God calls to Moses to come up the mountain and God gives the Law to Moses but the people are not able to come up the mountain with exception of some of the Elders (Ex 24)

When Moses comes down from the Mountain his face is shining so bright that the people cannot look at him and from that time on Moses needs to wear a veil over his face when he is talking to the people (Ex 34.29)

The people went to Moses to understand the spiritual laws

Moses was such a close follower of God that he could provide that light of clarity when they did not know what to do.

Moses was such a close follower of God that the light that he contained within him literally spilled out of him into physical reality

Perhaps some of us have had this experience, where we look at someone's face or in their eyes and we see a light there. We see that we can trust this person and that we can go to them for guidance.

This is a real experience that our Orthodox Faith attests to, these are the saints, who give us guidance and light when it comes to the spiritual matters in our lives.

Moses, and all the saints, are examples to us of this amazing statement that our Lord affirms for us today.

Our Lord says to us, *You are the light of the world*

He says that you and me give light to others

We give light to others **depending on** the extent to which we are his disciples.

It says, *the Lord said to his disciples...you are the light of the world.*

The disciples of Christ—you and me—provide light to those who are struggling and who are in darkness to the extent that we follow the commandments of God.

This is how our good works can be a light to others

In other words our virtue, the good spiritual habits that we have developed can help others.

Think about that for a minute, how we live, effects other people.

It seems like everywhere you turn you hear the slogan, “you do you” or “you do what makes you happy”—NO, these cannot be our slogans because how we live effects other people

And when you think about it like that, you and I are, to some degree, **responsible** for the salvation of others.

We are partially responsible for the salvation of our children, of our friends, of our students, of our co-workers...of our enemies...**especially** if we call ourselves Christians.

If, we call ourselves Christians—that is, if we call ourselves disciples of Christ—we are declaring to all the world **live like I do and you will be saved**

Can we say this? This is a very very difficult claim to make **do what I do and you will be saved—look at how I live and you will have light and clarity for you spiritual life**

Well, this sounds like it is turning into pride and patting ourselves on the back but we cannot forget one thing...

We cannot forget that the light does not come from us. The light comes from Christ and His commandments, as the psalmist says, *your commandments are a light unto my feet* (Ps 118.105)

So before we become too proud about being wise and light givers to others we can remember that it is the commandments of the Lord—shining through us that give the light to others.

So really, the more we commit ourselves to following the commandments of Christ, the more He will shine through us and the less we will get in the way.

And in this kind of paradox, the less we care about ourselves the more we become who we are supposed to be.

That means the less I follow my own desires the more clear my path becomes before me and the more clear I help to make the path to those who are walking alongside of me.

Think about how often our desires change. One morning I wake up and I want eggs, the next morning I wake up and I want oatmeal

One day I want to say my prayers, the next day I don't want to say them

One day I want to lie to get out of a situation the next day I think I have the courage to face the situation

Our desires are constantly changing. How then can I trust them to lead me the right way, especially when my desires are sometimes contradictory from one day to the next.

It is the Law of Christ that guides us through this life and this Law is found in the Holy Scriptures, in the teachings of the Holy Fathers, in the witness of the Holy Canons but most clearly and brightly in the person of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who became a man, so that he could die for us and make a way for us to live with Him again. Glory to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, His unbegotten Father and the all-holy and good and Life-giving Spirit. Amen.