

My Dear Brothers and Sisters and Christ:

Throughout my adult life, by God's good grace, I've been able to travel. When I say this, I don't mean traveling around by interstate or stopping at a faraway airport—although I've done more than enough of that. What I mean is that I've *lived* in many different places. I've set down roots here and there. In some places the roots are shallow, in other places, quite deep. In these places, I know where people work, eat, sleep, what they do for fun, and what they believe.

There is one thing that *ALL* places I have lived, visited, and travelled to share: In every single one of them you will find a building with a cross on top. You will find a church. In the rural Midwest they are most often cloaked in white siding. In the larger towns they will be sheathed in brick and mortar. In the southwest they will reflect a Spanish heritage sporting pastels and adobe archways. In the Northwest, cedar is the material of choice. On all, you find the one constant. Lifted high, near the pinnacle of each structure, there soars the cross. Often, the crosses can be seen for miles outside of town. They stand high above the landscape and rooftops, atop soaring steeples. For the Christian traveler, they are an outpost marker. Brothers and sisters are found there—and what great joy there is in being welcomed by them. Each cross stands as a fortresses against the cold darkness of the world.

Beneath these crosses, throughout the hamlets and villages, the “Great Commission” is on full display. The Church has gone. Disciples have been made. Fonts, both simple and ornate rest inside and bear witness to the fulfillment of Christ's commission. Pulpits and altars testify to the commanded teaching and guarding. There, for generations in many of these locations, people have gathered. In them these people have been filled with Christ. These structures bear witness to the people in these communities who *ARE* the salt and the light. People made salt and light by the Christ who visits His people beneath those many crosses lifted high. People like you.

It is no small thing to be that salt and light in our community—in whatever community we live. In our community, after receiving from God beneath His cross each week, we go out and leaven our villages and towns. We carry the voice of Christ within us, and it is our duty to speak as He gives us to speak, and to live and to love as He bids us to live and to love.

I could share with you many examples of how God's people have often acted to save a community from itself—from the darkness that lurks just below our “civilized” surface. There are examples of town fathers (and mothers) who conspire to willingly place their precious gift of children—often their own daughters—on display, scantily clad, to perform like Salome to the delight of the crowds. Often this is justified by the ever present “good cause” that needs money. For some it results in the loss of a kingdom—home and family—to the god of lust. In situations like these, it has been God's people that have begged a community to stay its hand. As a result, God's people are often mocked. They (we) are labeled as unloving, and unpatriotic (although it has often been God's people that have built hospitals, nursing homes, orphanages, and shelters in the first place). It is the burden of life under the cross. It is our burden. Yet speak and act we must.

Sadly, the salt and light are being thrown out and extinguished. Increasingly, as our culture continues to shift, the crosses are, in some cases, taken down, in others, they simply fall under their

own weight beneath a building that has remained too long forgotten and empty. Some are made into homes, others into businesses. Not too long ago, I gathered with people who drank and danced under the watchful eye of the Apostles who gazed down from the vaulted ceiling above. We each signed a guest book resting on a candle festooned table where once the High Altar conveyed the Body and Blood of the blessed Lord. In the midst of the tables from which we feasted, there tiled into the floor was the image of the Victorious Lamb. Not too distant from where I write, there is another such place where once font, pulpit, and altar stood, but now water, without miracle but aided by steel vats and chemistry, is changed into various libations. The giving of Christ's salt and light is replaced by the filling of mugs and bellies.

Other structures might still bear a cross, but the Christ whose cross hangs above is no longer found inside. These are the imposters teaching not Christ, but whatever itching ears wish to hear. They are the wolves in sheep's clothing. They infiltrate among us claiming to proclaim the truth, all while dealing in lies. It is the duty of those who *are* the salt and the light to call them out for what they. It is our duty to unmask them so the evil hiding beneath may be clearly seen.

My brothers and sisters, it is all too important for us to remember what and Whose we are. It is all too important for us to remember what we are in Him: The salt and the light. Hear from our Lord Himself:

*“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.*

*“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:13-16).*

This is the second section of the Lord's Sermon on the Mount. He has already proclaimed to us what we have in Him: Our *is* the kingdom of heaven. Because of Him, His life, death, and resurrection, we are people of His kingdom. We are the salt and the light.

What will happen to our communities if we no longer live under the cross? If we are no longer filled with Christ? If we hide His light? What will happen if we lose our saltiness? Perhaps we are seeing it already.

During this season of Pentecost we are called to reflect on what we are in Christ, and what this means for our day to day life in the communities where He places us. We recall and reflect that we live under the banner of His cross. Forgiven we are. Free we are. His we are. We are His salt and His light—which, being His, has great power to season and enlighten the world around us. This is, and should be, our life in Him.

In Christ, this Eighth Sunday after Pentecost, Year of our Lord, 2018.

Rev. Len Astrowski, Pastor