

The Secret of Your Success. (Mat 5:13-20; 1Cor 2:1-5)

* Recently I saw a picture of the frozen vehicles buried in snow on the highway near Chicago. First, I asked myself, what did happen with the hundreds of drivers? How did they get to their homes? How did they survive from the cold weather if some of them were dressed for dinner? Then, I was puzzled, as to how a highway can be freed from snow if there are cars without their drivers? It is quite difficult to act upon these problems, except to forget about them because we are not the people "To Whom It May Concern." After all I told myself, I cannot get out of all my troubles by just burying my head in the sand, especially if I encounter them on my way. Trying to find a remedy for everything including my hypothetical death, I recall the words of Jesus as he said, *Come to me, all you who are troubled and weighted down with care, and I will give you rest,* [Mat 11:28 (BBE)].

* Friends, on this Sunday we gather again in a learning community in order to be taught by the eternal God in flesh, Jesus Christ. As you remember at the last class Jesus spoke of *The Beatitudes*, (Mat 5:1-12). Being acquainted with that teaching we were prepared for the next one, known as the teaching of *Salt, Light and Fulfillment*, (Mat 5:13-20). We start our class with asking the Lord for being our teacher today. Here we pray. Dear Lord Jesus, we ask you honestly, be our teacher today and grant us the deep conviction of truth that you only are the solid ground upon which we can rest securely as it is written, *O LORD, you will ordain peace for us; you have done for us all our works. O LORD, grant us your zeal to work out with you to accomplish the Law and the Prophets.* For the sake of your most holy and honorable name we pray. Amen.

* When people encounter with threat of their lives trying to save themselves under any circumstances, they may be surprised with unusual outcome, that is to say, to lose their lives. In order to prove this insight we found an illustration. Here it is. The story based on the record of an American soldier Slovik who was among other Americans shipped to France in August 1944. Soon after the invasion, Slovik deserted from his detachment. In several weeks he came back making a formal excuse, in fact, he did the same things several times after that one. Finally, he was taken before an army court that condemned him to death. The record says he was shot by 11 army marksmen on the courtyard of an estate near the village of Sainte-Marie-aux-Mines. After hearing Slovik's story we conclude that withdrawing himself from the battlefields, the man had saved his life but because of this, he lost his life. By the way, there were 49 death sentences for desertion during the war; none was passed except Slovik's, but it is another topic.

* Today we've heard Jesus' teaching of *Salt, Light and Fulfillment*. It took me less than two minutes of reading, and it will take 20 minutes to read the entire *Sermon on the Mountain* (Mat 5-7). But if to believe some commentaries, it might take Jesus to preach for several days.

We mean, there is much more to say than was written. With God's help we tried to understand the significant things, and after careful reading, it became clear that the teaching itself is Jesus' reflection on the challenges of discipleship. Now we assign ourselves to explain the teaching of *Salt, Light and Fulfillment*.

* In figurative imagery Jesus' followers were seen as *the salt of the earth*, (v.13). The power of salt is in its saltiness as the power of Jesus' disciples is in their words and deeds, not in their muscles. When Paul arrived in Corinth, he said, *I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling*, (1Co 2:3). Despite Paul's physical weakness, Jesus began the church in Corinth through him, (Act 18:8). At that time the Lord appeared to Paul in a vision saying, *Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you*, (Act 18:9,10). Now imagine if Paul had withdrawn himself from Corinth because the furious opposition and threats on his life. Then, do you think Jesus would be with Paul after his desertion? Certainly Paul's words would turn into powerless sounds only spoken with human wisdom. After that, he would not be able to start churches. If salt loses its saltiness it is no longer good for anything, so much so with the disciples; if they had fled from the spiritual battlefield, they would be no longer good as Jesus' disciples, except to be thrown under the feet of *pigs and dogs*, (Mat 7:6).

* Again Jesus compared his disciples, in this instance, with the light of the world. As a burning candle if it is placed on a candlestick lights everybody in a house, so did the disciples, because through them Jesus and his gospel became known by everyone who was teachable. However, there would be much less problems of being the disciples of Light if the darkness of this world was indifferent. But the dark forces always wage war against the bearers of the Light. In fact, they cannot prevail against the Light if the bearers don't give up! No doubt, if Paul had not fought for the truth that caused him a lot of pain and afflictions (2Co 11:23-28), but had allowed the false to nullify the grace of God in exchange for his safety, life, then he would have lost his apostolic crown. Thanks be to God in Christ Jesus that for his grace, and thanks to Paul that he didn't separate himself from a battle with the dark forces.

* The next teaching in the series is *Fulfillment of the Law and Prophets*. At first glance we may assume that fulfillment of the Law and Prophets has already been accomplished in Christ. Unfortunately, not all things have taken place in human history. For truly, heaven and earth have not passed yet, (v.18); for truly, there are still many of us who have not entered into the kingdom of heaven. Significantly, Christ continues to fulfill the Law and Prophets today through his disciples as he said, *Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you*, (Act 18:9,10). When, after hearing our message, people repented, were baptized and believed in Jesus alone, the Prophets are fulfilled, (Luk 2:34).

When our righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees, the Law is fulfilled as well, (Rom 3:27). The history of martyrs for Christ's sake vividly witnesses on behalf of the fulfillment of the Prophets, (Matt 24:9).

But, if the disciples would withdraw themselves from the spiritual battle, then how can the Law and Prophets be fulfilled?

* As we began with the life story of a soldier, it seems suitable for us to finish with the life story on similar account. In this instance, there is one story on the landscape of history that impressed us very much. It is about a Roman legion that was martyred for refusing to sacrifice to pagan gods. The year of occurrence is 287 A.C. The record says, in response to a revolt in Gaul, the Roman emperor Maximian brought up the Theban Legion from Egypt that entirely consisted of Christians. Before the military campaign began, Maximian gave an order to sacrifice to pagan gods. The order was rejected by all the soldiers and their officers. Because of this, the brutal Maximian ordered to execute 1/10th of the Theban soldiers to be executed. When the rest of the men didn't give up their faith, the emperor ordered more to be killed. Finally, he slaughtered everyone who was left. This mockery of 6,600 men of faith happened near Lake Geneva. The memory of the event was so strong that in the middle of the following century a church was built in honor of those Christian soldiers. Those men of faith participated in the fulfillment of the Prophets. For the Scripture says, *God's faithful people are dragged off and killed, and no one even cares. Evil sweeps them away, but in death they find peace for obeying God,* (Is 57:1,2). Mat 16:25

* It seems the two contrasting illustrations had a similar outcome, both the deserter Slovik and the entire Christian Legion were executed. However, according to the Word of God the real outcome of two stories is profoundly dissimilar, - for one who had saved his life lost it and those who had lost their lives for Christ's sake found it, (Mat 16:25). The Christians who want to be powerful against the terror of the sword can find the power in the Lord Jesus Christ who conquered the death and received the key of life without end. In fact, the darkness cannot prevail against him, (Joh 1:5); so, it couldn't prevail against Theban Legion and it cannot prevail against us until we are in one battlefield with Jesus. Friends, stay in the battle against the darkness; it is the secret of your successful mission, for the King says, *Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you,* (Act 18:9,10)

Beloved, mercy and grace to you from God and our Father.

Amen