




Marist
ASSOCIATION OF
ST MARCELLIN CHAMPAGNAT

Local Group Formation 2024

LIGHT



I am the
Light of the
World

'I am the Light of the world'

Scripture reminds us over and over how light points to the presence of God in the world. In John's Gospel Jesus offers himself to his disciples as 'the light of the world', inviting them to follow him so that they "will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." (John 8:12). We recall how John introduces Jesus from the beginning as the word of God made flesh (John 1:14), and these two powerful symbols lead us to see how Jesus, the human face of God, reveals God to us through light.

In other Gospel passages Jesus invites his followers to share in the embodiment of the symbol of light, proclaiming that they too are the light of the world (Matthew 5:9-19). This passage welcomes all

disciples to recognise that they too, reveal God's spirit by living in a way which brings God's mission of love to bear in the world: "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, 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 in heaven." The challenge is put before all believers, that it is not enough to simply recognise Jesus as revelation of God's light, but we are called to also recognise that God's light lives within each of us.

To ponder and discuss:

It can be difficult to accept that each of us is the 'light of the world'. What is your personal response to this invitation from Jesus?

The Practice of Paying Attention

In evoking the symbol of light as the Spirit of God revealed in the world, Jesus was employing imagery frequently appearing in Hebrew Scriptures. In the Genesis creation stories, God invoked the power of light and named it good (Genesis 1:3-4). As the Israelites endured slavery in Egypt, God shrouded the Egyptians in darkness while only the Israelites were gifted light to see (Exodus 10:23). But nowhere is the personal invocation of light more powerful than in the story of Moses, who experienced the awe-inspiring theophany of God appearing to him in a bush ablaze with light.

Exodus 3

Moses at the Burning Bush

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, 'I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.' When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, 'Moses, Moses!' And he said, 'Here I am.' Then he said, 'Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.' He said further, 'I am the God of

your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then the Lord said, 'I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.' But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?' He said, 'I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.'

But Moses said to God, 'If I come to the Israelites and say to them, "The God of your ancestors has sent me to you", and they ask me, "What is his name?" what shall I say to them?' God said to Moses, 'I am who I am.'

Shimmer of Grace

In her book 'Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership', Ruth Haley Barton offers the following insights on this powerful piece of Scripture:

"One day as Moses was carrying out a routine task – tending the flocks of Jethro – he ventured out a little farther than usual and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. It was almost as if God had been waiting for this moment – waiting for Moses to settle down and become real enough so he could address Moses directly.

"It was an angel of the Lord that caused the initial commotion of the bush that was burning but not consumed. Because this was clearly beyond the normal, Moses turned aside to look. There seemed to be a cause-and-effect relationship between Moses' willingness to pay attention and God's willingness to speak. God spoke because Moses stopped, paused, noticed and turned aside!

"Many of us are choosing to live lives that do not set us up to pay attention, to notice those places where God is at work and to ask ourselves what these things mean. We long for a word from the Lord, but somehow we have been suckered into believing that the pace we keep is what leadership requires. We slide inexorably

into a way of life that offers little or no opportunity for paying attention and then wonder why we are not hearing from God when we need God most.


"Solitude brought Moses to a place where he had slowed down enough to pay attention to the busy that was burning in the middle of his own life. At last, all other voices had quieted down enough that he could recognise a new Voice calling to him from this very unlikely place. Finally he was in a position to receive a word from the Lord.

"One of the downsides of visionary leadership is that we can get our sights set on something that is so far out in the future that we miss what's going on in our life as it exists now. We are blind to the bush that is burning in our own backyard and the wisdom that is contained within it. We squander the gift of this day just as it is, these people just as they are, the uniqueness and the sweetness (even the bittersweetness) of this particular place on the journey just as it is, the voice of God calling to us in our own wilderness places.

"All of us have burning bushes in our lives, places that shimmer with grace, alerting us to the possibility that God is at work doing something that we could not

have predicted. If spiritual leadership is anything, it is the capacity to see the bush burning in the middle of our own life and having enough sense to turn aside, take off our shoes and pay attention! The burning bush was, after all, a most ordinary object that became extraordinary because it was on fire with divine activity.

Take a few moments to ponder the words from the book of Exodus, and the reflection offered on those words.

*Suggested music to support this time of silent reflection: **Light & Darkness, Alexandre Desplat*** 

Questions for discussion:

Consider where the 'bush is burning' within your own life and ministry:

- In your physical environment...
- In the people you encounter...
- In the moments where the ordinary appears extraordinary...

How can I find time and space to pay attention and notice God's spirit being revealed to me? How can we intentionally create and nurture that time and space in our ministries?



Closing Prayer

O God,
let something essential and joyful happen in me now,
something like the blooming of hope and faith,
like a grateful heart,
like a surge of awareness
of how precious each moment is,
that now, not next time,
now is the occasion
to take off my shoes,
to see every bush afire,
to lead and whirl with neighbour,
to gulp the air as sweet wine
until I've drunk enough
to dare to speak the tender word:
"Thank you";
"I love you";
"You're beautiful";
"Let's live forever beginning now";
And "I'm a fool for Christ's sake."¹

Ted Loder, Guerrillas of Grace

Together we pray:

Loving God,
We pray blessings on all who bear the light in unbearable times,
who testify to its endurance amid the unendurable,
who bear witness to its persistence
when everything seems in shadow and grief.
We offer our gratitude for those in whom the light lives,
in whom the brightness blazes— their hearts a chapel,
an altar where in the deepest night can be seen
the fire that shines forth in unaccountable faith,
in stubborn hope, in love that illumines every broken thing it finds.²
Amen.

1 Ted Loder, Guerrillas of Grace

2 adapted from 'Blessed Are You Who Bear the Light' by Jan Richardson



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