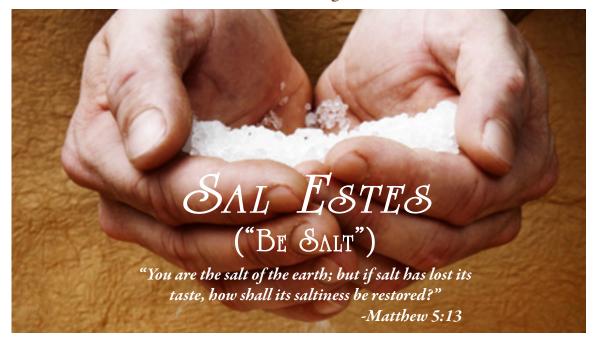
Maronite Monks of Adoration

September 2017



The Gospel according to St. Matthew has been L called "The Church's Gospel." Of all the gospels it presents the teachings of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ most completely. The Fathers of the Church quote this gospel more than the others so that you might say that this gospel was the Church's first catechism. Central to our Lord's teachings is the *Sermon on the Mount* (the Beatitudes) followed by his discourses on various they are to be "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world." Their lived discipleship would who lived in perilous times. bring God's "saltiness" and "light" to a world rendered tasteless and dark by the Evil One.

light of Christ. So how can we bring back this cal statement. In our own time we have lost that saltiness and the light of Christ to our age? One "great difference" and hence the "saltiness" of way is to look at the lives of our Christian ances- the Gospel. For the past fifty odd years we have tors who lived in the Roman Empire during the mistakenly thought that if we could move away Emperor Constantine ended the persecutions. body else" we would be able to build the "City Theirs was a very "salty" gospel and from them we of God" on earth. That song, "Let us build the can draw inspiration on how to restore the Gos- City of God" well summed up our hubris. Priests pel's saltiness.

A good reference work that parallels this period and can serve as a sort of Christian manual is "The Didache: An Instruction of the Lord Given to the Heathen by the Twelve Apostles." It dates from around the year 90 A.D. so we're talking a very authoritative work that goes back to the very beginnings. Every Christian should be familiar with this work. (It makes excellent matter for a Sunday sermon). Reading the New Testament together topics. He tells His disciples and the crowds that with this work can put some saltiness in our own discipleship as it did for our Christian ancestors

The Didache begins: "Two Ways there are, one of Life and one of Death, and there is a great dif-"But if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness ference between the Two Ways." Notice the embe restored?" It's no secret that the Gospel has lost phasis on the words "great difference." Back then, its "saltiness' and this age seeks to extinguish the when you became a Christian you made a radifirst three centuries of the Christian era, before from this "great difference" and "be like everyand religious no longer wanted to look or be "dif-

ferent" from everyone else. So many jumped on and hence salty: you rejected the Way of Death. It that bus. The moral teachings were ignored or reads: "Do not murder, do not commit adultery; do even rejected under the guise of "what unites us is *not practice pederasty* (quite common back then); more important than what separates us. "The way do not fornicate (no co-habitation); do not deal in to being a community "Happy Meal" where the the Christians showed themselves as having that "community" celebrated, worshipped and talked separation and moral distinctiveness that must our saltiness.

Our Christian ancestors teach us an important who are good Christians, who follow Christ the Christians have the duty to love God and their The principal mark of distinction is the moral life emy. The early Christians being told to love their from other people because the Christian lives mentary on the Gospel. Their neighbor was their earth a life that is not of this earth. Our Chris- verts like a love that suffers. Souls are saved tian ancestors were very conscious of the fact only by the Cross. that this earth is **NOT** our true home. That can be called lesson number one: We're supposed to traordinary stress on selfless and patient love of be different.

Rome. Over 100 forms of contraception existed do not want to love. To save this world we have back then. If that failed, they had a backup (just to suffer this world, we have to be hurt by this as abortion today serves as a backup to contra- world. To save the world we have to be patient, ception) which was exposing the baby to the ele- which means we have to take it from the world. If ments or wild animals to ensure its death. Many we're not willing to take it, then we're not willing of the pagan religions featured "sacred prostitu- to save it. tion" where you joined yourself to a prostitute in order to "commune" with the pagan deity. Di- emphasized were the direct opposite of the vices tertainment, plenty of blood sports existed; you concentrate on? Those which are opposed to the watched men kill each other for entertainment. vices of our day (those glorified by the media The Christians did not accept this as part of "plu- and Hollywood). The early Christians practiced ent strokes for different folks" for them!

of the Cross, indispensable for discipleship, was magic ("magic" was the ancient term for contrarejected for a sexual revolution and a life of self- ception); do not practice sorcery (tarot cards, forfulfillment. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass went tune tellers, séances); do not kill a fetus by aborfrom being a divine sacrifice worshipping God tion or commit infanticide." By rejecting these, to itself. By rejecting the "great difference" we lost characterize the true followers of Jesus. Remember, we are pilgrims in a strange land.

The Way of Life in the Didache gives us the follesson: Christian spirituality is different. People lowing duties of the true follower of Jesus Christ. way they should are distinguishable from others. neighbor. True followers of Christ love their enthat Christ's true followers lead. The conduct of enemies must be seen against the background of Christ's followers is unique and sets them apart the Church's first three centuries – the best comon another plane of existence. They are living on enemy in every sense of the word. Nothing con-

There's Primacy of Patient Love. There's an exone's neighbor: a patient love that causes suffer-Look at the reality that existed in pre-Christian ing. If you do not want to suffer, then you really

There's the practice of Asceticism. The virtues vorce existed and was easy to obtain. For en- of those days. What virtues should we "moderns" ralism" in the ancient Roman Empire. No "differ- Christ-like chastity. The Church's earliest tradition was absolute chastity. The married were to The *Didache* spelled out how they were different practice conjugal chastity by perfect fidelity to

their spouse until death. The unmarried were to practice pre-marital chastity by keeping their bodies and their passions under control. All were to practice asceticism which meant self-denial of the body and restraint of the senses and control of the appetites so as to remain a true disciple of a suffering Master.

Here was the saltiness that brought Christ to ancient Rome and can restore it to our formerly

Christian West. So here is our challenge and our response. Remember, our Lord has promised always to be with us. The Incarnate Son of God would never command us to live in an "impossible" way. He will always provide the graces necessary. The same grace that enabled these ancestors of ours to remain faithful. May we become His salt.

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