

One of the most influential documents of the Second Vatican Council—and the one that received the most careful scrutiny and debate among the Council Fathers—was the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, whose title means “Light of the Nations” or “Light of the Peoples.” It is a beautiful text, and one well worth reading.

Yet it is easy for us to forget what it teaches. We can be tempted to think of the Church primarily in organizational terms. Like a kind of religious corporation: headquartered in Rome, with branch offices around the world. The pope functions as the CEO, the cardinals and Vatican dicasteries form the executive leadership, bishops are regional managers, and priests are local branch managers—those most directly engaged with the “customers,” the people who call themselves Catholic.

Seen this way, our relationship to the Church becomes largely transactional. As customers, we feel little obligation beyond receiving services when it is convenient—baptisms, weddings, funerals, perhaps Mass when it fits our schedule. We “pay” for these services through the offertory when we feel we are getting something in return, maybe even adding a little extra when the service has been particularly good. And when we no longer feel that we are “getting anything” out of church, we quietly drift away—much like unfollowing a friend on social media or letting one interest be replaced by another: youth sports, social commitments, time at the gym. Sunday mass is easily displaced by society’s modern-day cathedrals—NFL stadiums filled with devotion, ritual, and loyalty of their own.

The Church is not first an institution or an organization. She is a mystery, rooted in the very life of God. At the opening of *Lumen*

*Gentium*, the Church is described as a sacrament—a visible sign and instrument of communion with God and of unity among all humanity. Like the seven sacraments, the Church is instituted by Christ himself for the salvation of souls. And like the sacraments, she is a vessel through which grace flows. The sacraments never come to us in isolation; they always come to us through the Church, so that what we receive may overflow into love, service, and joy for others.

For the Church to fulfill her mission as light to the nations, that light must shine through each one of us. We do not receive grace only for our own salvation. We receive it so that our lives might draw others toward Christ. The very nature of the Church is missionary. And that mission is not something delegated only to clergy or specialists—it is entrusted to every baptized person.

We do not simply receive from the Church. As members of the Church, we share what we have received. If we do not, the grace given to us remains incomplete—not because God withholds it, but because we have failed to let it bear fruit. Grace is meant to move, to radiate, to be given away. Our holiness, then, can never be private. It is always ordered outward. We are not saved apart from the world, but to serve the world, and through our acts of charity, to convert the world.

This is precisely what Jesus means when he tells us that we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Salt that loses its flavor is useless. Light that is hidden is easily extinguished.

The Church, then, is not meant to turn inward or to exist for herself. She exists to make Christ visible. And she does so most convincingly when her members live as light—quietly,

faithfully, courageously—in the ordinary circumstances of their lives. When we stop treating the Church as something we consume and begin living as who we are—a sacrament of God’s presence in the world—the light of Christ shines more brightly.

This is why Jesus does not say, “Try to become light someday.” He says, “You are the light of the world.” The question is not whether the light has been given, but whether we will allow it to shine. Light hidden under a basket serves no one. Salt that loses its flavor cannot preserve or heal.

Our Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV, captured this beautifully when he said: “I still consider myself a missionary. My vocation, like that of every Christian, is to be a missionary, to proclaim the Gospel wherever one is.” Those words remind us that discipleship is never passive. To belong to Christ is to be sent by Christ. To receive his light is to reflect it.

The world does not need a Church that hides her light or keeps it for herself. It needs a Church that believes what she proclaims: that Christ is the true light, and that through us—through our words, our choices, our mercy, our fidelity—his light still shines. Not loudly, not triumphantly, but clearly.

When we keep the light to ourselves, it slowly grows dim. Our faith loses its energy, our joy its sharpness, our lives their savor. But when we give that light away—when we live our faith openly, generously, and without fear—it grows stronger, clearer, and more compelling. This is the life-giving strength of the Gospel: the more we share what we have received, the more fully alive we become. The way we protect the light of faith is not by hiding it, but by sharing it; in giving it away, we

safeguard it. “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.” (Jn 15:11) Now is the time—not to hide, not to hold back, but to let the light of Christ shine through us, so that the world may see and give glory to our Father in heaven.