

Lent 4

3.10.24

I grew up in Philadelphia. Just 75 miles from there is a place called Crystal Cave. One crisp autumn day, my parents brought two of my brothers and me to this attraction. From the outside, it was nondescript – just a small visitors' center and gift shop. But once we descended down into the cave, my jaw dropped at just how beautiful it was. I had never seen stalactites and stalagmites before. The rock formations and the colors of those formations were soul-searing. The lighting on those various rock formations made them even more dramatic.

In addition to all that beauty, which was found below the surface of the earth, there was another event we experienced during that visit which was incredibly profound. About halfway through our tour, the park ranger stopped and announced that there's a good chance no one had ever experienced total darkness. He stated you might have experienced darkness when the lights suddenly went out in your home or at night. But he added that there was always some ambient light around. Once our eyes adjusted to the darkness, you could still see some shapes of things around you.

He asked the group if they wanted to experience REAL darkness. The group reluctantly responded, "yes." So he turned out the lights. And they stayed off for about a minute. As our eyes adjusted, we realized we were experiencing complete and utter darkness. He asked the group to wave their hands in front of their faces. "Do you see anything?" "No," was our disconcerting and uncomfortable reply. Just when the little children in the group and even some of the adults began to feel uncomfortable, the lights came back on. It was a **very long** 60 seconds. The group agreed, we much prefer light to darkness.

Whenever Jesus speaks about being the light of the world who has come to save us from the darkness of sin and corruption, I always think back to that experience. Even though that event took place over 55 years ago, I don't ever want to live in the darkness. I want to be a child of the light.

Sin is often referred to as darkness. The darkness in that cave paralyzed our group. No one moved. No one spoke. Everyone felt uncomfortable or even afraid. Sin does that. It spiritually paralyzes us. It deadens our hearts. It makes us feel uncomfortable and guilty or shame-filled, because it keeps us from the comfort, peace, and very life that God always intends to give to us.

On Ash Wednesday, which we commemorated almost four weeks ago, our foreheads were smeared with blessed ashes. Those ashes remind us of our mortality. They remind us that sin marks us and defaces us. But those ashes were placed on our foreheads in the shape of a cross. That cross also reminds us that the death of Christ frees us from the darkness of sin. The death of Christ conquers our fears. The death of Christ brings his light to our eyes and hearts, leading us to his Kingdom for all eternity.

In a particular way, we spend our time during these remaining days of Lent recalling our sin. We spend these days asking God to take away that sin and all that it deadens within us. We spend these days leading up to Easter asking God to recreate us through his Son's life, death, and resurrection so that we will now and forever live as children of the light.

(For the 9:30 am Mass – Second Scrutiny)

As St. Paul preached to the people of Ephesus, "live as children of the light, for light produces every kind of goodness, righteousness, and truth.... (And) take no part in the fruitless works of darkness." (Eph. 5: 8-9, 11) The freedom and new life that the blind man experienced in today's gospel came about because he believed in and embraced Jesus who announced that he was the "light of the world." (Jn. 9:5)

(For the 5 pm Mass – Cycle B readings)

That reality is certainly affirmed in today's gospel passage from St. John. In the third chapter of John's gospel we hear that "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life" (Jn. 3:16). Truly, Jesus is the light which came into the world (Jn. 3: 19). Whoever lives God's truth comes to the light and is led to eternal salvation. And we will show the world that we are children of the light in the works we do (Jn. 3: 21).

One summer while in the seminary, I worked at our diocesan camp – Camp Good Counsel – in Floral City in Citrus County. While doing some work to prepare the grounds and facilities for our campers, I ended up injuring my eyes. I was brought to the emergency room of the local hospital and treated. The doctor said I would fully recover, but I needed to keep my eyes completely covered for a day. I did that. And I spent the next twenty-four hours dependent on some of my fellow counselors to lead and guide me around the camp. I was so grateful for their help and assistance...mostly. But they did have a little fun with me a few times during those twenty-four hours. At one meal, they put a plate of food before me. But as I tried scooping up the food, they kept moving the plate. They laughed and so did I. But it was a reminder of how dependent I was on my sight and on the light. Another time, I needed their help finding my way to the bathroom. As we started to walk there, I had the sense that I wasn't going where I should be going. Sure enough, they were leading me to the girls' restroom. Blessedly, the head counselor saw what they were doing and intervened. Again, I was reminded of how dependent I was on my sight and on the light.

Blinded by the darkness of sin, we are led astray and away from God's goodness. Blinded by the darkness of sin, we struggle to find our way. But with the light of Christ, we can see all things, do all things, and become all things in and for Christ and his Church.

In the Lenten season and then for all time, let us live as children of the light. Let us share the glory of God's light by the words we speak, the actions we engage in, and the very lives we lead.

Amen? Amen!