

JJ¹

When we think of the darkness of night, we tend to think about bad things because it seems that more bad things happen when it is dark than when it is light. Darkness can sometimes be a very scary thing. At some point in time most of us, if not all of us, were scared of the dark. When we were young, many of us had night-lights. Yet as small as those lights were, they comforted us. But why? It is because when it is dark, we can't see. If we can't see we can't know exactly what is going on. We hear a bump, and we wonder, "What was that?" Sometimes our imaginations run wild and we imagine a monster is coming to get us in our sleep.

The darkness we talk about today is far more scary than any imagined monster, because this darkness is very real and very dangerous. In fact, only terrible things happen in this darkness. But just as we can be comforted by a night-light, the light we talk about today brings far more comfort than any night-light can and shines far brighter. Because of this we will learn how important it is to **FOLLOW THE LIGHT**.

From the account of last week's Gospel, we probably fast forward several weeks. Jesus had gone back to Nazareth. Andrew

and John, who we heard about last week, had returned home to Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee. And John the Baptist had continued his ministry. As we know, the greatest part of John's ministry was calling people to repentance, no matter who they were, even if they were the king. And John did just that. You see, Herod had seduced and stolen his brother's wife. Again and again, "John had been saying to him: 'It is not lawful for you to have her.'" (Mt. 14:4 NIV84) And because of that "Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people." (Mt. 14:5 NIV84) So instead, Herod had John put into prison to shut him up.

It was then we're told that Jesus left Nazareth and he "went to live in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. He did this to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, along the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles..."

Isaiah describes the people of Galilee, and really, the world, as "people dwelling in darkness" and "those dwelling in the region and the shadow of death." At the end of our Old Testament reading we heard Isaiah describe this darkness as a

¹ JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for "Jesus Help". It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

yoke of burden and the rod of an oppressor (Is. 9:4).

That darkness, that yoke which burdens all people is the yoke and darkness of sin and our oppressor is the devil. As a yoke will bind two beasts of burden together so the yoke of our sin binds us to the devil and to one another in our misery. We have inherited this darkness from our parents from the very moment we were conceived. This darkness is full and complete.

The plague of darkness the Lord sent on Egypt could symbolize this in a way. That darkness was one that could be felt and not even a lamp burning could give any light. No one could see anyone. There was no light whatsoever. (Ex. 10) Just imagine how frightening that would be! But that only lasted for three days. The darkness of unbelief is even worse because it caused us to constantly live in the shadow of death. It hung over us, pressing us down, taunting us as the devil longed for the day when we would die so that we could suffer the absolute darkness of hell with him. This is the darkness that longs to rule over us every day of our lives!

And what's worse is that we could not get rid of this terrible burden. We could not find our way out of the dismal darkness of unbelief. By nature we were

doomed to wander about in this life in pain and without hope until we died and found ourselves in the inescapable torments of hell. And God knew this and that is why he sent his Light to show us the way so that we might **FOLLOW THE LIGHT.**

God sent his Light who has "broken the yoke that burdened [us], the bar across [our] shoulders, the rod of [our] oppressor" (Is. 9:4). He accomplished this by being crushed himself so that he could

crush the serpent's head. He did this all so that "the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed" (Is. 53:5 NIV84). Jesus Christ is the Light as he himself testifies, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (Jn. 8:12



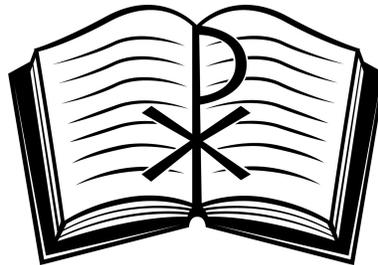
NIV84). Because Jesus has overcome the darkness of our sin and the darkness of the power of the devil he is the only one who can bring us into the light, his light.

Jesus brings us his light in the same way he did two thousand years ago—through his Word. Through the law, he calls us to repentance. He shows us the terrible darkness of our sin and that we deserve hell because of it. He does this so that we recognize our sin and confess it to him. Then he opens our eyes to the light of his love in the gospel, which shows us every-

thing he has done for us and by doing so he leads us out of darkness. And as we heard just a moment ago, Jesus promises that whoever follows him will never walk in darkness again but has the light of life, eternal life!

In our psalm we proudly confessed, "the LORD is my light and my salvation, of whom shall I be afraid" (Ps. 27:1). This refrain perfectly summarizes the Christian's joy when we ponder our God's amazing love for us that he would shine his light into our hearts even though time and again we have deserved to have him hide his face from us. You could say that the Christian's daily plea of repentance is, "Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger; you have been my helper" (Ps. 27:9). Trusting in our Lord who has caused us to follow the Light of his Son we are fully "confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living" (Ps. 27:14).

It is in heaven where we will forever live in the Light and there will be no darkness at all, but as we wait for that day we live to **follow The Light**. The same light that shined in the hearts of Andrew, Peter, James and John and caused them to immediately leave everything and follow Jesus is the same light that has shined and is shining in my heart and yours. But as we follow the Light, our Savior, we must also be aware that there is still darkness around us and within us.



The darkness of living in the shadow of death looms over every heart. It is a consuming darkness for those who do not, by faith, see and **follow The Light**. Yet, even now, we live beneath the shadow of death. It has struck close to home for some of us in the last months. It nearly did for Ken and Margie in the great tragedy in Ft. Lauderdale. If you remember the young pastor's wife for whom we raised money a few years ago to help cover costs from a double lung transplant, she just died two weeks ago at the age of 34. The shadow of death surrounds us and looms over us.

Ah, but a Light has dawned for us already, even as we live in the shadows. The Light has come. The Light was snuffed out in death, but rose again in all his brilliant glory. The Light has shined the light of his

gospel into our hearts, assuring us of the same glorious resurrection to eternal life and light!

One of the amazing things about living with the Light forever in heaven is that there won't be any shadows there. Here on earth, we cannot escape physical shadows and spiritual shadows. But in heaven, Jesus' light will fill heaven completely. We won't need sun, moon or stars to give us light. The Lord will be our light! (Rev. 22:5) This fact points us to a far greater thing. In heaven, all the darkness of sin will be gone. We will be perfect and live in wonderful unity with our

Lord. All darkness will be gone, yes, even the the shadow of death for we will live in the land of the living!

Friends, live in the Light of Christ and the freedom that Light gives. He has shattered completely that which held you prisoner to sin and the devil. He has set you free to follow him every day, every moment of your lives. When you see the darkness lurking, run the other way, keep running to the Light that gives you eternal life. Amen.

SDG²

² SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for “To God Alone Be The Glory”. This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn’t about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.

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