



December 24, 2017

The Fourth Sunday of Advent & the Birth of Our Lord

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.

— Isaiah 9:1

Dear Friends;

Advertising would have us believe that ‘the holidays’ are all about a manufactured perfection—children screaming in delight about the perfect gift, or an adult dancing as a child around a new car. It is all light and no darkness. Because of this many are left feeling lost, alone and in despair because their lives are more filled with darkness than light. Many of us live in sentimental denial. We try to pretend it is all perfect. But then something happens to shatter the illusions we have created for ourselves.

Recently, the Discovery Bay Elementary School was vandalized. One of the graffiti phrases on the wall read, “The darkness prevails.” The first thought that came to my mind was the Chinese proverb, “Better to light one candle than to curse the darkness.” The darkness is real enough—our love of guns, our endless war on terror, racism, sexism, sexual harassment, our tribalism, egoism, predatory capitalism, selfishness, nationalism and isolationism. In short we call it sin. We can’t ignore the dark or we will stumble and fall. But rather than curse it we must look for a light to guide us. How can we shine light in our community?

The two great feasts for Christians are Christmas and Easter. The liturgies of both those feasts begin in darkness. Hope teaches us to be patient and wait. The darkness represents our fears and failures. But God from the darkness can bring forth the light of love that animates our existence. Nearly 13.8 billion years ago out of the darkness of nothingness exploded the light and energy that became our universe. After countless eons and seemingly endless twist and turns life evolves. Eventually that divine process gives birth to the human race.

Out of humanity a people caught in the darkness of slavery are led to freedom and a land flowing with milk and honey. Again and again that Chosen People would know the darkness of oppression and the domination of the empires of this world. From them a young girl out of the darkness of her womb would give birth to the light of the human race and Son of God. He will trample down the dark forces of ignorance, sin and death and reveal the light of God’s mercy and love. Like a candle in the night he burns brightly as a guide for us to follow.

The dominant symbol of Christmas is light. A people in darkness see a great light. The glory of the Lord shines on the shepherds. A great light in the form of a star shines over Bethlehem. It shines on a place where a child sleeps. That light guides the wise who seek out truth. That light beckons us all. The opening prayer for the Mass at Dawn on Christmas says:

*God of Splendor,
at the birth of your incarnate Word
we are bathed in new radiance;
grant that the light which shines in our hearts through faith
may also show forth in our actions.*

To those who weren’t expecting him, it must have seemed that Jesus appeared from a dark seclusion yet spreading light in his wake. Thanks to Christmas we will never go without light again. In darkness at the Vigil of Easter we light a fire, bless and light the Paschal/Christ candle. The priest proclaims “*May the light of Christ rising in glory dispel the darkness of our minds and hearts.*” Then from that candle one by one, we pass the light to each other. Better to light one candle than to curse the darkness. Christ is born!

Peace and Merry Christmas!

Fr. Ron

Esta carta está en español en el sitio web: www.stannechurchbyron.com