

I HOPE SO!

When you entered into the body of the church this morning and you dipped your hand into the holy water fonts and made the sign of the cross you then went to your pew. You bent your knee in a genuflection and then entered the pew. But while you were doing those things did you notice the small red flame to the right of the tabernacle? It is called the sanctuary lamp flame and there is always a flame there. And the flame has a meaning. It means that the Lord is present in the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle. It means that The Master is here. That little flame is a flame of vigil, a flame of watchfulness. It is always there—except for one day each year. Holy Saturday. On Holy Saturday the tabernacle is visibly empty and open. And the feeling in the church that day is decidedly different. You notice the lack of presence. He is not here. He is not present. He is absent from our midst. It is a bit eerie and a bit disconcerting. There is a stillness but an emptiness.

That flame assures us and reminds us. Jesus is the light. On Holy Saturday night in the darkness of the church we sit in silence and the celebrant lights a fire in a brazier out in the narthex and blesses the fire and then lights the large Easter Candle, the Paschal Candle. We then profess into the nave of the church and the altar servers share that light with everyone who is present. All are holding tapers. Before that we sit in the darkness. In silence. We don't do this as human beings very often if ever except Holy Saturday night. It serves as a reminder that the Father sent his Son into a world that had become truly darkened by sin in order to show us how to live and to become the very light of our lives. The little taper that we hold that night serves as a reminder of the day of our baptism when we had one of our Godparents hold that candle as a proxy for us.

For us humans, darkness often has a meaning. Darkness suggests discouragement. Often darkness implies sin or becomes the condition for our sin. The darkness is where we go to hide from those dimensions of our lives that we are ashamed of, or hate or fear. And yet often we are afraid of the dark. Not just little kids. Adults too. Especially of the spiritual darkness. We don't like to be "in the dark" with regard to what is happening in our world or our families or our places of work. We do not enjoy not knowing what is going on. We thoroughly dislike it when we cannot see why certain things are happening. And yet, the darkness is often a place of hiding for us. We go to it even though we hate it and we fear it.

What are you hiding in the darkness? What are you hiding from? What do you hold there because you are afraid to bring it into the light? Do you now that it is precisely for the darkness that Christ left us the sacrament of confession, reconciliation and absolution. Christ is light. Not a bright, garish, blinding light. He is a healing light, a gentle light, a light that becomes a salve for the wounds of our sins, whether our own sins or those done unto us. His light is a healing balm.

There are some questions for us today.

- 1) Do you really believe that Our Lord can cure what ails you, what you hide from in your own dark places?
- 2) Do you really believe he will cure you? And wants to cure you like he cured the blind man?
- 3) Will you let him?

The answer to each is a simple “I hope so.” I hope so. One more question. Do you sometimes feel as if you are losing your hope? As a person? As a Catholic? As an American? Hope is tiny. But hope is powerful. That is why that little flame is a reminder of hope, of our reason to hope.

What I am about to say is something that you may not ever have noticed before but has been there in front of you all your life. What is the first thing you say after the homily has ended? You all stand. Together you say—**I believe**. That is your response to the word just broken open before you. I believe. And it means—I hope. I live in hope. In that Creed we profess our conviction about the light that Jesus is, God from God, light from light, true God from true God. In that Creed we yearn for that light to come into our lives to bring us encouragement, meaning, and hope.

That light which we welcome is also called grace. It is the grace we need to continue to do the good that we do. It is the grace that prompts us to pray for people and our world. It is the grace that empowers us to make all those hidden sacrifices we make that no one but the Lord knows about. It is the grace that enables us to offer our suffering in union with the sufferings of Jesus Christ. And in the light of that grace slowly we begin to see. Slowly the enlightenment takes hold. Slowly the light dissipates the darkness and we begin to see. Things make sense. We realize we are not alone. The Lord is with us. And the sign we see each time we come to worship in Eucharist is the sanctuary lamp. Look at it each week. Let it remind you of all that the Lord has done and is doing.

My friends, open your heart and soul to this light that Jesus is. Let him in. Let his light in. Pray for that light to abide in you. Pray that light to vanquish the darkness inside of you/ Pray that the light begins to shine forth from you and that it begins to bring light to those you live with, work with and interact with each day. Each of us needs this light and each of us alone has the power to open ourselves to that light. In the consecration and at the communion of this Mass may that be your prayer.