

CHRISTMAS DAY – 2020

When Fremantle prison was closed there was a de-commissioning service attended by staff. I was among them and as we walked out of there for the last time, a notice had been placed on the big central door which read, "Would the last one out switch out the lights." Darkness is the absence of light be that physical or spiritual. When Ghandi died, it was said in India that, "The light has gone out of our lives and there is darkness everywhere." In other words, the people's sense of hope, purpose, direction and leadership had disappeared.

In contrast, when darkness is shattered by light, even that of a single candle as during the Easter Vigil liturgy, there is a new beginning and a new hope that calls for a new song. "And there was darkness upon the face of the deep.... And God said, "Let there be light and there was light... and God separated the light from darkness" (Gen 1:12-14).

The prophet Isaiah's people had lived in times of darkness in which there was much suffering. They had abandoned their faith in God and worshipped pagan idols. Their complete ruin was close, but Isaiah pronounced a new day of light in which darkness would be dispelled. He prophesied that a new king, a descendent of David would be born. He would be filled with God's spirit and peace and would rule with justice and righteousness.

Wind the clock forward several hundred years and once again God's people were in spiritual darkness. They lived under the shadow of the Roman Emperor who ruled by oppression, declaring himself to be a god. The hope that Isaiah had given them still lived in their hearts and St Luke tells us that in Bethlehem the city of King David, the light of God's glory surrounded shepherds on a hillside announcing that God's promise was fulfilled. God himself had become Man to scatter the darkness not only for his chosen people of Israel but also for the Gentiles. St Matthew also tells us that wise men from the east were guided by a light to Bethlehem where they fell down and worshipped the new king and brought him their gifts. A new day had dawned and a new era had begun.

St John tells us that the child is the Word of God who is the Light of the World. There will never again be an absence of light for when Jesus described himself as the Light of the World, he was saying that he is the exclusive source of God's spiritual truth in the world.

In the world there is physical light and spiritual light. We can perceive one, both or neither. Physical light is necessary for life. There is even a cult – Breatharianism - that claims humans don't need to eat or drink, they *only* need to be in the light and breathe! Spiritual light is necessary for spiritual life, and this can be a measure of our relationship with God. Faithful Catholic disciples of Jesus will be drawn closer to Christ the Light through prayer, scripture and the sacraments. Christian disciples are spiritually phototropic.

Unbelievers are the opposite. They seem to prefer darkness to light. Their creed is expressed by John Milton in Paradise Lost, "Evil be thou my good" (iv, 109-111).

The Light of Christ is divine energy. His light gives us courage in these times of fear, comfort in these times of grief, hope in these times of trial and temptation. His light gives us peace. His light does not shine so that the world sees our sin and shame. It shines so that we all see

His forgiveness and grace. His light leads us out of darkness into the light and out of death into life. His light pierces the strongholds of evil and shatters them. His light brightens the darkness of sorrow and gives rescue.

Because Christ is our light, even in moments of deepest darkness there is still light, just as during the physical night the moon, planets and stars appear bright because they reflect the light of the S-U-N. Christ is the S-O-N of God and his light is reflected through our fellow believers in his Church. As his disciples, we are all called to reflect his light in the world and that light is brightest to others when there is no gap between what we say we believe and how we live.

I wish you all a happy, blessed and spiritually illuminated Christmas for Christ **the** Light of the World shines and those who embrace it and reflect it are filled with God's glory and become people of goodwill upon whom God's favour rests.

Msgr Harry Entwistle

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