

Out of the Darkness and Into the Light

2 Chr. 36: 14-17a, 19-23; Eph. 2: 4-10; Jn. 3: 14-21

For those of us who have worked in an office, we've probably noticed that some people come in very early and others come in later. The first group say that they were 'morning persons'. They like to get an early start to the day. The latter group proudly proclaim that they are 'night owls' or 'nighthawks'. They don't come alive until later in the day. There is something about being active at night that is especially appealing to them. Perhaps it is the darkness. Some people want the darkness.

In the Gospel, Jesus spoke about the appeal of darkness for some people when He said this:

'...the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed.'

Obviously, Jesus was not accusing every 'night owl' of being evil and preferring the darkness of night to hide their evil deeds, but He was commenting on people who rejected God's loving gift of salvation by rejecting Jesus Christ. Why? Well, Jesus is the light of world. He shines a bright light on everything and on everyone so that we can see ourselves as we really are. Sometimes, we don't like what we see so we prefer to stay in the darkness.

The Gospel contains the famous words of John 3:16: *'For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but may have eternal life.'* Seems like a great deal and so simple! Believe in Jesus and you will be saved; you will have eternal life. Paul said to the Ephesians: *'For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God. This is not the result of works, so that no one may boast.'* Through the merited gift of faith in Jesus, we are saved.

Paul said that our faith in Jesus is a grace from God; an unmerited gift. And that faith is what saves us, just as it did the Good Thief who was crucified with Jesus. He went on to say that salvation was not the result of good works. Does that mean that we do not need to do good works? This is a question that many of us wrestle with. Do we need to proclaim our faith in Jesus? Do we need to perform works of charity? Or do we need to do both?

We have only to think of the words in the Letter of James: *'What good is it to profess faith without practicing it? It is thoroughly lifeless. Show me your faith without works, and I will show you the faith that underlies my works.'* (Jas. 2: 14-15). Our belief in Jesus compels us to do good works. Otherwise, our faith is empty and we remain in the darkness. We have to practice our faith. We have to 'do' our faith; otherwise, it is merely 'lip service'.

We have been given the gift of Lent to come to conversion through prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Let us leave the cover of darkness and come into the light not only by professing our belief in Jesus but also by following His command to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, care for the sick, welcome the stranger, visit the imprisoned ... (Matt. 25: 31-46). If we do that, our faith will be full and overflowing with love and we will realize the joy of Easter every day of our lives.