

Homily.3OrdA.1.22.23
Saint Bernard Church
Deacon Tim Sullivan

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE LIGHT OF CHRIST

The “light” is a prominent theme in the Bible.

Jesus says, in John 8:12, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

In today’s Gospel, Matthew indicates that, in Jesus, “the people who sit in darkness have seen a great light.”

What I want to talk about this evening is the history of the light, and how the light in a very important way has always been visible throughout human history.

In the first reading, the prophet Isaiah proclaims that the darkness has been dispelled, and upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone. He also uses the words quoted by Matthew, that the people who walked in the darkness have seen a great light.

Isaiah lived more than 700 years before Jesus, so the theme of the light has a long history in the Bible. And, in a very significant way, the light goes back at least to the time of the Greek philosophers.

The Greek philosophers, especially Aristotle, by applying reason to the study of nature, came to believe in a rational universe that was created by a divine intellect. They also believed that reason was the important factor in moral decision-making, and that every human being had an immortal soul.

After the Greeks, there were Roman philosophers who shared these ideas about the light. Cicero said “True law is reason, right and natural, commanding people to fulfill their obligation and prohibiting and deterring them from doing wrong... God... is the sole author and sovereign of mankind.”

With the Jewish people, God intervened directly and revealed even more about the light. God revealed to them that human beings are made in God’s own image, and that God breathed into the first human his own breath, his own Spirit.

The Book of Wisdom in the Old Testament, in Chapter 13, tells us about those who don’t see the light. “Foolish by nature were all who were in ignorance of God, and who from the good things seen did not succeed in knowing the one who is, and from studying the works did not discern the artisan.”

As if what God revealed to the Jews was not enough, He sent His Son, Jesus, to earth, to reveal the Father’s truth and His love with the utmost clarity.

In John's Gospel, we are told that, with Jesus, "the light came into the world" and "whoever lives the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God."

One of the most powerful passages in all of Scripture is in Chapter 1 of St. Paul's Letter to the Colossians. Listen carefully to these words:

He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. **16 For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible... all things were created through him and for him.** He is before all things, and **in him all things hold together.**

Think about what this means. All of creation, properly understood, is a reflection of Jesus. It has been said, "The rhythm of the universe is the heartbeat of Jesus." Do we understand that all the good that exists bears the imprint of Jesus Christ?

If you and I are made in God's image, and Jesus is sent to earth by God the Father as the perfect image of God, then we are made in the image of Jesus as well. We are created through Him and for Him.

To put it another way, every one of us is wired for Jesus. Each of us has a natural attraction and capacity for God. To the extent that we live the reality that we belong to God, we flourish, in this life and the next. We are who we were meant to be.

In Baptism, we are reborn as sons and daughters of God, members of Christ and incorporated into the Church. With respect to the issue of light, the Catechism describes baptism in these words;

"Having received in Baptism the Word, the true light that enlightens every man, the person baptized has been enlightened, he becomes a son of light, indeed, he becomes light itself."

For all of us who are adults, it's important that we remember our baptism and take adult ownership of it. That means making a frequent, conscious commitment to make Jesus the center of our lives. We want His light to shine in and through us.

We should be asking ourselves on a regular basis: Is the divine life of Jesus active in me? How much of His divinity am I experiencing and sharing in my life? What might be blocking out the light of Jesus in me?

It's no secret that the world today desperately needs the light of Christ that we can and must share with them.

St. Paul describes the current situation very powerfully in his Letter to the Romans. He says that many human beings have, in his words, "become vain in their reasoning and their senseless

minds have become darkened...They have exchanged the truth of God for a lie and revered and worshipped the creature instead of the creator.”

As a culture, we are losing our grip on reality. We have lost the importance of reason in making important decisions.

Instead, so many today are attempting to create their own version of reality, a false reality that is contrary to nature, to what God intended by His creation.

In place of reason, feelings and emotions have become for many the basis of their values and decisions.

The consequences of these false realities and the use of feelings in place of reason are increasing at an alarming rate: addiction, alienation, loneliness, anxiety, depression, despair, all of which have become epidemic and often deadly.

Along with these cultural changes, more and more people are rejecting Jesus. The Bible, even in some nominally Christian churches, is no longer the commonly accepted standard for making moral decisions. A lot of people today think the best solution for our problems is more and better mental health services. That can be helpful, but what we really need is more of Jesus.

In our Catholic faith, we have the fullness of the truth about Jesus. The Catholic faith is the greatest gift any human being can receive, and it's the answer to what our world desperately needs today. Every one of us here tonight needs to claim it, know it, live it and share it. If we don't know it well enough to share it, we have work to do.

In the words of Saint Luke, Jesus came “to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death and to guide our feet into the way of peace.” It's our job, especially now, to help Him do just that.