

CHRISTMAS EVE HOMILY - YEAR B (Homily 02)

“The Light that overcomes Darkness”

(Isaiah 9:2-4, 6-7; Psalm 96; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-16)

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There is almost nothing as heart-warming when traveling by boat on a rough lake at night under completely dark, cloudy skies as turning a corner and seeing the light of a familiar beacon or light. Then we know we are close to home and safety.

Tonight, we celebrate the light of Christ which banishes all darkness.

That there is darkness in our world is all too real. One example suffices to illustrate: In one northern community, a young man, high on drugs and alcohol and driving at a high speed, struck and killed a promising seventeen year old girl with such force that the coffin had to be closed. He went on to strike another five vehicles before stopping and attempting to flee on foot.

There is also the darkness of economic hardship, political unrest, family tensions, corruption, depression for some, loss of hope for others and addictions of all kinds, just to name a few.

Tonight, however, we hear a prophecy of good news from the prophet Isaiah. A light will dawn in this darkness; all sin, oppression, injustice and darkness will be overcome. This will be accomplished by a male child who will also be king, with a kingdom that will be established forever. There will finally be peace, rejoicing, justice and fairness in that kingdom.

In the gospel, we do not hear of prophecy. Rather, we hear of prophecy being fulfilled. This is reality. The familiar Christmas story resonates with warm tones and hope-filled words. What Isaiah could only describe with hope was being lived out. The promised child who would be king was born to humble parents in the backcountry of Judah and the world would never be the same. Light shown from the heavens and angels sang his glory to humble shepherds. To the humble, liberation from all darkness was at hand.

In the second reading, St. Paul repeats what Isaiah had to say, using different words and from a different perspective. For St. Paul, we are now to be the light, to live the way of Jesus, to put flesh to the love of God shown us in the birth of Jesus. We are the recipients of this grace, this salvation, this redemption found in Christ.

Our role now is to repent, to renounce all darkness, to strive for holiness, to receive forgiveness, to be sanctified and healed, to live in the light. And that is happening today. At the funeral of the young woman mentioned earlier, the mother was able to actually forgive the man who had killed her daughter. She had the faith, the grace of God, the spirit of compassion to understand that the young man was a troubled youth, out of his mind with inner pain, trying to medicate that pain with drugs and alcohol, which led to that tragic action. True, she will have to live with the loss of her daughter for the rest of her life, but she will not have to add to that a burden of anger, resentment and bitterness. She was a truly a light shining in all that darkness. What an example she is for us all.

We know that the baby born in the wood of the manger also hung on the wood of the Cross. We know that the baby wrapped in swaddling cloth was also wrapped in burial cloth. But above all, we know that the child that was made flesh two thousand years ago also rose from the dead and took our humanity with him into heaven.

What he left us until he comes again is the Eucharist, which he asked us celebrate in his memory. Whatever the darkness in our own lives, the infidelities and sins, this is our great act of fidelity. We have been doing this for over two thousand years, and in so doing, we continue to spread the light of Christ that alone can overcome the darkness in our world.

May we, like that mother, strengthened by the Eucharist, spread the light and love of Christ to all we meet this day and always. May God bless us all.