

IF GOD BE FOR US; JOHN 1:1-18; 1.3.10; THOMAS H. YORTY; WPC

The Christmas Day editorial in the *New York Times* commented how in winter, in these parts – northern climates – dusk has a way of gathering in pools not long after the noon hour and we find ourselves plunged into total darkness by 4pm.

In this season when the world turns dark, there is a correspondence between the winter solstice – the shortest day of the year and the days just leading up to and following it – and this morning’s gospel reading:

“What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”

It is an exceedingly hopeful statement. We are surrounded by darkness not only because of the earth’s position in the solar system but also because these are unusually difficult times.

I am not sure this is the *most* difficult of times, but we have our share of challenges: two wars, systems from the economy to health care to education we seem to have outgrown, and the fear that gathers in pools, like darkness in the midst of a winter day, from incessant reports of ‘breaking news’, I think CNN calls it, of train wrecks, bombings, epidemic illness, eco-disaster and worse.

“Am I safe?” “Are my loved ones safe?” “My co-workers?” cascade the questions for parents or commuters or workers in high-rise buildings or anyone beyond that time of youth when we think we are indestructible.

What makes the phrase “the light shines in the darkness” so powerful is its immediacy. Not “the light may shine,” or “did shine,” or “will shine.” But “the light *shines* in darkness.” That’s what light does, it pushes back fear that shrinks and debilitates our lives.

Here’s an example: most mornings I trek to my study on the third floor, coffee in hand and muse quietly for a few moments south and east down Norwood Ave. The other morning, before dawn, I noticed the black night sky give way to shades of indigo, then deep blue, then to a spectacular streak of rose and pink as if some swordsman had slashed an opening in the dark curtain of night.

John’s words this morning also break open the darkness of our age or any age in which these words are proclaimed. The darkness is not eliminated; but it is no longer so all-encompassing or final. I would wager our very body chemistry changes when we behold light like that – light that announces hope.

I can give you another example. Last week I came across an account dictated by a man with Lou Gehrig’s disease. The disease is advanced so the man has to be ‘prepared’, as he says, by others for bedtime since he cannot move his arms or legs.

His reflection entitled “Night” is about how he gets through seven hours without moving an inch and nothing but his thoughts to console or disturb him.

What stood out for me was how the prospect of morning, when he would be transferred to a wheelchair and the company of others, lifts his spirits as he fights off darkness and feelings of isolation and imprisonment.

We humans are remarkably resilient. All we need is a little light. A little hope. A shred of promise to cling to and we can face otherwise debilitating darkness.

It may not answer all of our questions at once or instantly dispel all of our fear or discouragement;

but a streak of pink in a dark sky or anticipation of human companionship in the morning or signs that opposing parties want to repair the creation or make peace – these are things that tap into the deep well of life within us and release courage and stamina and sacrifice and whatever else we need to get through the dark winter of injustice or war or personal failure.

2010 is a dark time in more ways than one. But the Sacraments today are beacons shining from God's shoreline of sanity and peace:

William Pennock Keuleman in his fifth generation baptismal gown and our commitment to him and to all of our children and the children of the world; and this table spread with bread and wine – as we reenact a simple meal that shattered the darkness of crucifixion on the road to Emmaus and at a lonely beach in Galilee.

John the Baptist said he was not the light “but the light that enlightens everyone was coming into the world and to all who believed in him he gave the power to become children of God.”

After living in the darkness of self-righteous perfection and mean-spirited bigotry, St. Paul was blinded by God's light; knocked off his horse so that he had to be led by the hand for three days until he opened his eyes as if for the first time and perceived himself and the world around him with clarity.

Rather than defending his religion of rules and punishment; he basked in the healing light of Christ's call to him, ceased his campaign of persecution and used his own life as an example of rehabilitation.

Without explanation, he said, God snatched his life from the pit of self-loathing and despair and gave it back to him and so he could conclude, “If God is for us, who can be against us?”

It's not a bad question for us to ask as we face these times in our nation and world and the challenging issues of our personal lives.

Of course, there is a familiar voice on one shoulder that will list all of the reasons why it is foolish to put our hope in the flickering light of the Christ child; but if we listen to it, as Paul did, we just may hear another voice, on the other shoulder that says, “the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.”

That small voice and even a sliver of God's hope can light our path in a world where darkness gathers in pools by noon. If God is for us, who can be against us? Indeed! Amen.