

April 5, 2015 Easter Homily

Brothers and sisters, perhaps some of you may be of an age to remember a most remarkable occurrence on an early November night in the year 1965. A power outage blanketed the Northeastern region of the United States. Nearly thirty million customers lost electricity; the ones who suffered the most were without power for thirteen hours!

Being a child of only eleven, I was among those who were thrilled. It was an unforgettable experience. To this day, I have a vivid memory of peering outside my bedroom window and seeing the homes in my neighborhood dimly lit by candlelight. That dark night taught me an invaluable lesson about one of nature's greatest mysteries, the mystery of light. Indeed, the darkness gave me an appreciation of light... Its brightness, its warmth and its link to life itself. Darkness, on the other hand, inspires fear, dread and terror.

On this holy night, the Church uses the language of symbols to aid us in our understanding of the central mystery of our faith: the Resurrection of Our Blessed Lord, Jesus Christ. One of the primary symbols is light! Darkness makes all of us sensitive to the light.

Consider the mystery of Our Lord's passion and death. Under cover of darkness, the enemies of Jesus plotted ways of arresting him. On the night before he died, he was betrayed at the Last Supper. At that same meal he spoke those haunting words to his disciple, Peter: "This very night before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times" (Mk.14:30). The story of the passion takes us into the darkness of the Garden of Gethsemane (Mk.14:32-51). When Jesus is arrested, all his male followers run away into the night and leave him to face alone his suffering and death. And on the day of Our Lord's crucifixion, we are told that darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. (Mk.15:33).

After the terrible night of the cross, we read the following words in Mark's gospel: "And very early on the first day of the week, they went to the tomb" (Mk. 16:2). The Evangelist contrasts light and darkness. The sun has just risen when the three women go to Christ's tomb. It is likely six o'clock. The light of dawn is streaming into the sky when something they never imagined is about to be revealed to them. In the Resurrection of the Eternal Son, God has, once and for all, overcome the malevolent power of darkness. We recall the words from the thirtieth psalm: "In the night comes tears, but with dawn cries of joy". The three women are walking into the light of day on which the sun will never set.

Easter celebrates the Resurrection of the light, the resurrection of life. The power of death and destruction does not have the last word. One can fully appreciate why great artists of the past have depicted Our Lord bathed in a glorious light.

Perhaps here an anecdote may be helpful. Prior to the Second World War Edith Stein was a distinguished philosopher in her native Germany. Following her conversion to the Christian Church, she and her sister, Rosa, also a convert, entered religious life as Carmelite sisters. In retaliation for the Dutch bishop's condemnation of the Nazi's

treatment of the Jews, the two women were arrested and boarded a train for the infamous concentration camp at Auschwitz. On her way to the gas chamber, Edith (Sr. Benedicta of the Cross) turned to her sister, Rosa and said "Come, Rosa, we are going for our people. We are traveling toward the East, toward the dawn". As her earthly life drew to a close, Edith Stein expressed in words her hope of eternal glory and the dawn of a new day!

St John's vision of the heavenly city comes to mind in the Book of Revelation: "The City did not need the sun or the moon for light, since it was lit by the radiant glory of God and the Lamb (Jesus) was a lighted torch for it" (Rev. 22:23).

Recently, the good news of Easter was tempered somewhat by the tragedy in Kenya. Nearly one hundred fifty Christians were massacred by religious extremists. Once again, we are reminded of the power of darkness. But, to recall the words of the Blessed John Henry Newman, "O God, you can bring light into darkness". When those victims were baptized, they were given a share in Christ's saving death. Only an everlasting reward awaits them, May their martyrdom result in an abundant harvest for the church!

Let us rejoice in the Risen Lord. Death no longer has power over him. And that is eminently true for us as well.

Amen!