

ASHES TO FONT

Embrace the Light

Gospel of John 3:14-21

Jesus said to Nicodemus:
 “Just as Moses lifted up the
 serpent in the desert,
 so must the Son of Man be
 lifted up,
 so that everyone who believes in
 him may have eternal life.”

For God so loved the world that
 he gave his only Son,
 so that everyone who believes in
 him might not perish
 but might have eternal life.

For God did not send his Son
 into the world to condemn the
 world, but that the world might
 be saved through him.

Whoever believes in him will
 not be condemned,
 but whoever does not believe
 has already been condemned,
 because he has not believed in
 the name of the only Son of
 God.

And this is the verdict,
 that the light came into the
 world, but people preferred
 darkness to light, because their
 works were evil.

For everyone who does wicked
 things hates the light
 and does not come toward the
 light, so that his works might
 not be exposed.

But whoever lives the truth
 comes to the light,
 so that his works may be clearly
 seen as done in God.



“Laetare Jerusalem” is Latin from Isaiah 66:10 for “Rejoice, O Jerusalem.”

This midway point on our Lenten pilgrimage to Easter is known as “Laetare Sunday” or “Rejoice Sunday.” We are just 21 days from our annual celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus. Many may rejoice because we are halfway through our Lenten acts of penance and sacrifice, while others rejoice because they have grown in their relationship with Jesus. Others will rejoice this weekend as they feast on the Word of God at our Sunday celebration of the Eucharist. Some priests may rejoice because we still have three weeks to prepare for the most important time in our Christian calendar—the Holy Triduum.

Rejoicing is not only something Christians do, but Christians always rejoice because the Word came and dispelled the darkness. The Father so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son into our world to guide us and save us, changing the world forever.

This Sunday’s scripture passages moderate our Lenten Penance as a contrast between light and darkness—dying and rising. We would naturally think of Penance as dying to self, but it is more than that. The positive aspect of penance is that the dying always leads to life; resurrection.



Prayer of Thanksgiving

Everlasting King, your will for our salvation is full of power. Your right arm controls the whole course of human life. We give you thanks for all your mercies, seen and unseen. For eternal life, for the heavenly joys of the Kingdom which is to be. Grant mercy to us who sing your praise, both now and in the time to come. Glory to you, O God, from age to age.

I was born a weak, defenseless child, but your angel spread his wings over my cradle to defend me. From birth until now your love has illumined my path, and has wondrously guided me towards the light of eternity; from birth until now the generous gifts of your providence have been marvelously showered upon me. I give you thanks, with all who have come to know you, who call upon your name.

Glory to you for calling me into being.

Glory to you, enlightening us with clearness of eternal life.

Glory to you, O God, from age to age. Amen.

- Abridged Byzantine hymn, *Prayers for the Moment*, ed. Fr. Peter John Cameron, O.P., Magnificat, 2015, p. 120.

I recently made my semiannual trip to the dentist for a checkup. When my Buddhist dental hygienist asked how I was doing with my dental hygiene routine, I admitted I had not flossed everyday as I should have. She was shocked. She could not believe I told the truth. She said almost everybody tries to convince her (or lie) that they floss daily. I remarked that I try not to lie; but, also I know when she looks in my mouth she will know what the truth really is in regard to my flossing habits.

The omnipresent God who loves us dearly, knows everything in our minds and hearts. Just as one cannot hide plaque and tarter buildup from their dental hygienist, we cannot hide our human tendency to choose the darkness over God. When we think we can hide these choices, we are only deceiving ourselves.

The important challenge is to enable the words of Jesus must leap from the pages of the Bible into our hearts and scar so deeply that we live God's Word. We must move from paying lip service to Scripture and belief toward concrete, everyday actions that witness to our choice to come to the Light through prayer, fasting, and charitable works. In these concrete actions we move from darkness to light—we journey through dying to rising. This leads us to authentic rejoicing because we live the truth—we live the Light.

For contemplation and reflection:

1. I might come closer to the Light this Lent if I....
2. My daily living witnesses a preference for darkness or light when I...



Rembrandt, "Christ with Hands Folded," The Hyde Collection, Glen Falls, NY.