

Dearly beloved,

“For a child is born to us, and a son is given to us, and the government is upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called, Wonderful, Counsellor, God the Mighty, the Father of the world to come, the Prince of Peace.” So does the Church sing this morning, rejoicing in the Lord for his birth of the Virgin Mary, coming as He does to save us from our sins and unite us to Himself.

As many of you know, this Mass is the third Mass of Christmas, the first two being at midnight and at dawn. In those Masses the Gospel according to Luke is proclaimed, with the story of Our Lord’s birth at Bethlehem narrated, with the angels and the shepherds. But we have heard the prologue of the Gospel of John, and what is more, the Letter to the Hebrews. Both of these Scriptural passages emphasize Jesus’ eternal existence, His superiority to the angels, His role in creating the world. Instead of speaking of the events surrounding His birth in time, they speak of His eternal birth of the Father. There is no reference to the infant lying in the manger, but rather reference to the Word who rules the world.

The Church wishes us to think of these things, even if it is a bit overwhelming on a morning like this. While it is always good and holy to contemplate the eternity of the Son of God, it can prove difficult on Christmas, when most of us prefer to consider the image of the child in His Mother’s arms.

And yet St. John does offer a concrete image to us, that of light. While eternity ever lies beyond the power of our comprehension due to our being creatures of time, light is something we experience every day and all can relate to. “In the Word was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it...He is the true light, who enlightens every man that comes into the world.”

Light is essential to human life; without it, we can do nothing of lasting value. We rely upon light to read, to learn, to communicate, to work. So it is with the Son of God—He is the one who makes possible our action on both a natural and a supernatural level. Since He is the origin of the world, indeed the pattern the Father used in order to make all creatures, He is the origin of our knowledge of those creatures. And since He is the Savior, He is the Author of grace, and thus whatever good we do, we do because He sanctifies us and moves within us.

And light is also healing: it warms us with its gentle rays, it gives hope when it is dark or cloudy, it gives joy to our lives palpably but quietly. So it is with our Savior—by His coming among us and His presence in the sacraments and in our souls, He slowly but powerfully heals us, He binds up our wounds, He gives us strength to forgive and love others as He does.

The Word has become flesh for this reason: to save us from our sins and to raise us up; as the Fathers say, He has become man that we might become God. And He does so precisely by becoming a light that we can look at; a light that we can touch and not be burned by. St. Paul says the Father dwells in light inaccessible; the Son has become accessible by taking on human nature. And He becomes even more accessible by being present on the altar, by allowing Himself to be consumed by us under the appearances of bread and wine.

Thus the Eucharist is a light for us, and a sun within us that warms and heals us. By receiving Christ into our souls, the darkness that is in us little by little gives way to the light that He brings by His presence. The more often and the more worthily we receive Him, the more the light takes hold within us, and Our Lord's words begin to be fulfilled in us, "If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, it will be wholly bright, as when a lamp with its rays gives you light." The light that the Eucharist brings to us starts to show in our eyes and in face, for though we be fatigued by the world and burdened by trials, yet the joy Our Savior gives us makes our faith and hope resonate deeply in our souls.

St. John says that this light that is the Son of God incarnate "shines in darkness and the darkness has not overcome it." It never will overcome it, unless we allow it to. As St. John Chrysostom says, "If He enlightens every man that comes into the world, how is it that so many have gone on without light? He only enlightens every man, so far as pertains to Him. If men shut their eyes, and will not receive the rays of this light, their darkness arises not from the fault of the light, but from their own wickedness, inasmuch as they voluntarily deprive themselves of the gift of grace. For grace is poured out upon all; and they, who will not enjoy the gift, may impute it to their own blindness."

Thus we can shut our eyes to the light that comes to us in the Eucharist, principally by receiving without attention and without charity. How often do we receive without praying beforehand and making a careful effort to be open to the mystery of Christ's presence as He is placed on our tongue and enters our souls! And regarding charity, besides being in a state of grace, we should also forgive those who have wronged us before we receive and beg forgiveness of God so that we may be at peace with Him and with His children. And if the wrong done to us is too fresh to forgive, let us ask for the grace to forgive, to be open to this grace. What God desires is a heart open to Him. "A sacrifice to God is an afflicted spirit: a contrite and humbled heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." The one who approaches Communion with these thoughts in his heart is assured that the light Christ brings will dispel the darkness he struggles with interiorly.

The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not, and will never, overcome the light. This is the joy we should have this morning. As in the book of Proverbs, "The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day." The newborn Christ will illumine us from within, until finally we shine like the day in the kingdom of heaven. Of all the things we may do today to celebrate, may joy characterize them all, the joy of Christians who know their Redeemer has come and will not fail to carry out His mission to save sinners and to reward those who love Him and serve Him. May the Christchild bless each of you this morning and grant you a share in His consolations, that we may all reach the world to come, where we shall adore the one who has saved us, forever and ever.