

## FROM THE PASTOR

Dear Brothers and Sisters



“The people who sit in darkness have seen a great light.”

January is the month when there is least light in the Northern Hemisphere; the cold and dark affect the psyche and spirit.

Not surprising that the tour industry does a booming trade this time of year, as people seek to get away from the

North East winter and head down South to the sun. Florida, the Caribbean, and Turks and Caicos all seem so much more attractive right now.

Hop on a boat in Bayonne, and in a couple of days you are in warmer, sunnier climes; hop on a plane at EWR and in a couple of hours you are in the tropics. Just as we need sun and light, we need the true light which is God himself. We cannot live without him. To do so would be to experience an eternal winter, would mean to sit in darkness.

For some the darkness seems eternal, never ending. Not even the Caribbean or the Florida sun can dispel it. It is a darkness they experience within; in their fears, their anxieties, and worries. It takes many forms: doubt and uncertainty, loneliness, lack of confidence, regrets, lost opportunities, and hurts: verbal, emotional, or physical. It is a darkness of dryness and aridity, of not feeling loved, and of being unable to love. It is, above all, a darkness of the experience of the absence of God. This darkness can be self-inflicted, or may come unbidden.

Some of the Saints experienced it as the ‘Dark Night of the Soul,’ – a spiritual crisis in the journey towards union with God. Through no fault of their own, they were plunged into darkness, in some cases for many years. St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa of Avila, and Padre Pio di Pietrelcina all went through it, as did Blessed Teresa of Calcutta, whose darkness lasted from 1948 almost up until her death in 1997. Saint Therese of Liseux wrote of her own experience, assailed with doubts about the afterlife, she reportedly told her fellow nuns, "If you only knew what darkness I am plunged into."

St. John of the Cross titled his poem "The Dark Night", because darkness represents the hardships and difficulties the soul meets in detachment from the world and reaching the light of the union with the Creator. He tells us there are several steps in this night, the first is a purification of the senses, and the second and more intense is that of the purification of the spirit.

All of us have experienced this darkness, to a greater or lesser extent. We are the people who sit in darkness. Unlike the Saints, it is more likely that the darkness is often of our own doing, but nonetheless there is a great Good News proclaimed in today's Liturgy: a great light has appeared.

God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God...Christ is the Light of the world, which shines amid darkness. In fact, in the experience of St. John of the Cross, darkness itself can become a means of discovering the light which is within:

1. On a dark night, Kindled in love with yearnings  
--oh, happy chance!--  
I went forth without being observed,  
My house being now at rest.
2. In darkness and secure,  
--oh, happy chance!--  
In darkness and in concealment,  
My house being now at rest.
3. In the happy night,  
In secret, when none saw me,  
Nor I beheld aught,  
Without light or guide,  
save that which burned in my heart.
4. This light guided me  
More surely than the light of noontday  
To the place where he  
(well I knew who!) was awaiting me  
--A place where none appeared.
5. Oh, night that guided me,  
Oh, night more lovely than the dawn,  
Oh, night that joined  
Beloved with lover,  
Lover transformed in the beloved!

Fr. Sean