

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Out Into The Light

The preacher about sin Teddy Roosevelt heard was, unsurprisingly, “agin it”. In much the same way Light is life and knowledge, vision, glory, truth and beauty. Darkness is everything negative, blinding, concealing, refusing, inimical to life and relationship. It is everything we’re “agin”.

Long Day’s Journey Into Night

The Gospel of John makes a great theme of light. *The Word was the true light, that enlightens everyone who comes into the world.* From that moment we pay attention whenever the Gospel speaks of light. Nicodemus comes to see Jesus “by night”. In the chapter about the man born blind, Jesus speaks very solemnly about the moment he has reached: *The night will soon be here, when no-one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.* Before going to Lazarus’ grave he says: *No-one who walks in the daytime stumbles, having the light of this world to see by. The one who walks around at night stumbles, having no light as a guide.* John rather dramatically records that, when Judas left the Last Supper, “night had fallen”. So that critical time, predicted through the Gospel as *the hour* turns out to be a dark hour. The intimacy of the Upper Room is shot through with foreboding, and when they have sung the psalm they leave for the Mount of Olives, and the dark grove of Gethsemane. Here the Light of the World and the Prince of Darkness meet. Notice that the unholy alliance of the Roman cohort and the Temple guard bristles with “lanterns, torches, and spears”; They are on a violent errand, and it is one which needs *artificial* light - they would be *unsighted* otherwise. Even in this contrived light, they themselves *stumble and fall back.*

Life In The Dark

Not everyone experiences life as a light-filled room. For many people the world remains obscure, and even threatening. I was disturbed to read the other day an article alleging that a huge percentage of our *children* are mentally ill. Depression is a major affliction for us to tackle at the birth of the Millennium; I am sure everyone engaged in pastoral work will say the same. I think these are unsurprising facts, but they engage our thoughts. I myself do not find the situation too off-putting. After all, living in darkness may

be far from enjoyable, but we are not off the map. Jesus did, in fact, walk in darkness to Gethsemane, and Nicodemus “knew his Lord by night”. Tradition has Jesus born at midnight in midwinter; at his death the sun hides its face. God is not disabled in darkness: in Isaiah he says: *I create darkness and light.* So in our lives, we do not demand perennial daylight. We are content to set out in dark times, knowing the care of the Shepherd who guides us in the valley of the shadows. There are lessons to be learned there that could not be heard in the glow of a delicious morning. The Psalmist speaks of the people of God: *As they go through the Bitter Valley, they make it a place of springs; they walk with ever-growing strength: they will see the God of gods in Zion.*

Naked I Entered The World

So the Son of Man is lifted up, innocently condemned because of our guilt, immortal, but mortally wounded because of our disease, exposed in death, as a sign of the eternal gift of life. As the light goes out of these most loving eyes, he enters on our account into the darkest place. But his dying is no victory for the darkness. He is always the Light of the World. We thought the Crucifixion was merely a work of darkness. But it is, at its deepest, a work of God himself. Jesus accepts our hatred, our nails, our spear: but he is himself still at work for the Father. From his death utter revelation shines: in Him, we see our God made visible.

Fr Philip