

6th Sunday of Easter

Beautiful stars fill the sky, but in the city we don't see them. On some nights when I was a student at Conception Seminary College, I used to walk out a little distance from the buildings onto a field just to look up and see the stars. Even there in rural Missouri, I couldn't see them all. A friend of mine who lives near the Pacific coast says, "If you want to see stars, get on a boat." City lights can be beautiful, especially at Christmas. City lights can be functional, like streetlights. City lights can provide security by keeping away thieves. But they also hide the stars, and they even diminish the impact of a full moon, which otherwise can make night seem like day.

Near the end of the Book of Revelation, St. John sees the new Jerusalem, a city ablaze in light. "It gleamed with the splendor of God," he says. "The city had no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gave it light, and its lamp was the Lamb."

Light is the symbol that opens the Easter Vigil each year. We gather outside in the patio in the dark, light a fire, ask God to bless it, and then we light the paschal candle for the first time. When we enter the dark church, we light our candles and watch light spread. The church lights then come on as if the Easter fire illumines everything, even the electrical lights. The paschal candle burns on each one of the fifty days of Easter Time. After that, we light it again whenever we celebrate a baptism because in that sacrament a human being shares in the light and life of Christ. We also light the paschal candle at funerals because it prefigures the glory we all hope to see. When those we love close their eyes for the last time, we pray that they will not see darkness but light.

When St. John wrote the Book of Revelation, people had no electricity. They had too much darkness. We have too much light. Not seeing stars barely illustrates the difficulty. At times we cannot see the light of Christ. Other lights want our attention. Many of these lights come from screens - television, video games, movies and computers. Some of these lights lead us away from giving time to people who need our company and our direction. We let these lights entertain us instead of becoming a light to serve others. Some of these screens bring us down into the depths of pornography, inviting us to find false enjoyments that ultimately cannot satisfy. Some screens train us to accept violence as a way of life, promoting the use of weapons to resolve problems, and avoiding the work of reconciliation, forgiveness and charity. Living in the city, we see too much light, and it is hard to see the Lamb of God, who is our lamp and our guide. Sometimes we need to get away from these distractions, like a person who gets on a boat in order to see stars.

At the beginning of the Bible, when all was in darkness, God spoke the words, "Let there be light." At the end of the Bible, the glory of God shines light once again. My brothers and sisters, let us pay attention this week to the places where we see light, and let us ask ourselves, does this light come from the Lamb of God? If it does not, then let us walk away, close our eyes, get on a spiritual boat, and seek the stars. We will see light, and we will be light for the world.