

We do some things at night that we would never do in the day. And they're not all good. Night is typically when people have too much to drink, couple up with the wrong partners, or seek perverse entertainments. At night you may go places, meet people, say things, do things, or take things you would not normally during the day. Night brings temptations. One way to examine our consciences is to ask, "Am I the same person in the dark as I am in the light? Am I the same person on Friday night as I am on Sunday morning?"

In John's Gospel, Jesus has a penetrating conversation with Nicodemus; the subject matter ranges from serpents to salvation, and from darkness to light. This is the conversation that gives us arguably the most famous verse of all sacred scripture, John 3:16. You see it on signs even at sporting events. "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." In the same conversation Jesus says something else that we all know to be true: those who do wicked things hate the light. Darkness is a playground for sin.

This conversation is especially mysterious because of when Nicodemus came to Jesus. He came at night. He was a Pharisee, a kind of leader of the opposition; he had no business becoming a disciple. But Jesus fascinated him. When Nicodemus sought out Jesus, he was doing something that his peers would not permit. So Nicodemus did it at night.

We do some things at night that we would never do in the day, because darkness removes inhibitions. It's as though night gives us a disguise, a role to play, a hiding place where we can explore without being discovered. In the dark, some of our actions are sinful; but, as Nicodemus shows, other things we do are good. Some of our most intimate conversations happen at night; some of our most loving actions are made at night; some of our greatest sacrifices take place at night; some of our most intense prayer comes at night. The absence of light confronts us with who we are and what we want. Even in the day, people sometimes close their eyes to pray, to remember, to endure pain, or to kiss. With our eyelids, we can create night when it isn't there.

During the final weeks of Lent, we will have opportunity to do good or ill with the darkness that comes. There are many occasions for the sacrament of confession in the evenings. Our Holy Thursday mass of the Lord's Supper and the great Easter Vigil both take place at night. They are times when we can experience God more strongly, but only if, like Nicodemus, we enter the darkness for the right reasons.

Here are some questions to think about as Easter draws near: When have I not set my heart on God? When have I loved the things of this world or my own preferences more than God? Do I worship the false gods of money, superstition, selfishness or illicit drugs? Do I choose violence as a solution to problems? How do I use the night? To pursue my pleasures, or to speak with Jesus?