

A few years ago when I visited Father Aloysius in Uganda, he met me at the airport just as it was getting dark. There was a full moon that night. We stayed in guest rooms at a convent nearby, so we didn't have far to drive. But there were virtually no streetlights on the way, and at the convent the electricity had gone out; this was a fairly normal occurrence. The sisters greeted us with lanterns we could carry to our rooms. Standing there on the convent lawn in the dark, Father Aloysius pointed to the sky. He said, "You see how important the full moon is to us each month." He was right. Once my eyes had adjusted, I could see quite a bit in the moonlight. In a poor country like Uganda, you appreciate light.

This was even more true in the time of Christ. The New Testament appreciates darkness and light. In John's gospel, Nicodemus meets Jesus in the dark. In Matthew, Jesus tells the disciples that they are light for the world. And in the Letter to the Ephesians, Saint Paul uses the same contrast. We hear that passage as our second reading today, the day we hear the story of the man born blind, whose physical sight comes to him along with the spiritual sight of discipleship.

Making the connection between faith and light, Paul compares life before and after baptism. He says, "You were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord." Christianity changes behavior. "Light produces every kind of goodness and righteousness and truth." To receive baptism was to receive this light, so that Christians could be light for one another.

Halfway through Lent, we think a lot about light. We're getting more daylight every day, and the sun is finally melting down the snow. The penance we are doing should throw light on our sins, but also on the possibilities to overcome them. The full moon will shine on Good Friday this month, just before the most important mass of the year, the Easter Vigil.

Most Catholics come to mass on Easter Sunday morning rather than the Easter Vigil, but that particular Saturday night mass is the most important event for Catholics each year. We greet the risen Christ by lighting the Easter candle, proclaiming the gospel of the resurrection, baptizing new members to our community, and sharing the first eucharist of the Easter season. It is a long mass, and it all takes place in the dark. Christ overcomes that darkness in the light of his resurrection.

During Lent we face up to our sins and do battle with them. We fight them with prayer, fasting and charity. Then, during the Easter Vigil, we conclude our penance when we renew our baptismal promises. We renounce sin and profess our belief in Christ. We pray into the night, and we acclaim Christ whose light breaks through every darkness we face.

In this serious time of year, we take stock of our lives, and we ask God to help us make the changes that will turn us away from fruitless works of darkness and make us arise in the light of Christ.