Light always triumphs over the darkness

Good Friday 2017

As Jesus was dying we are told by the evangelists that a darkness came upon the earth. The sun was darkened, St Luke says. St Matthew records: “Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.” (Mt 27:45). Darkness came at midday and remained until 3pm when the Lord expired.

Darkness came upon the earth as the One who declared that he was the Light of the World, surrendered to the powers of death.

Times of darkness invade our human life at different moments. There is a special darkness of grief and loss when someone close to us dies. We can sink into times of deep sadness and inconsolable grief. There is a hole in our hearts. Our spirits can feel empty and our future can seem purposeless. Human loss is an experience of personal darkness.

Darkness can come upon our spirits when we are confronted by our own personal crises such as financial trouble, marital breakdown, or serious life threatening illness. We sense a powerlessness and our future is in jeopardy. Fear can beset us. We can find ourselves anxious and uncertain. Our sense of confidence can evaporate. We can feel ourselves a victim of powers of that are destroying our life.

We all know times of darkness. And in those moments of darkness it seems that the dark is supreme and all light has gone. We can see no way forward. We can see no hope of things changing. We can sense life and hope and purpose being drained from us.

We may put on a brave face, but we are dead inside. Such experiences can be debilitating. They rob us of joy and hope. We can be tempted to abandon even life itself.

Indeed there is one journey that each of us must take. It is our own dying. For some it is a journey into a deep darkness. It may be the experience of human pain. It may be a spiritual darkness of loss of hope. It may be the sense of being a burden and the loss of a sense of purpose or value. For some it is a journey where one can feel completely abandoned. There can be an appeal to hasten down the path to death, to choose death at our own hand, or assisted by others who have a misplaced compassion.

This is not the Christian way. It is never the Christian way to abandon life or hasten its coming in a bid to end it.

There is another way. It is the way of faith. It is the way of hope. It is the way in which we learn to look beyond ourselves, and even beyond those around us.

In these moments of extreme darkness where can we turn? We know that if we turn in on ourselves we quickly succumb to deadening impulses. We can find all hope being drained from us and a creeping despair growing in our hearts.

In these dark and difficult human moments there is a direction to look. It is to look upon the cross of Christ. Christ, Son of God but also Son of Man knows the full reality of the human condition. He entered into the depths of human darkness in his own passion and death. Not only did he experience excruciating pain, but he endured the jibes of ridicule – “He saved others why does he not save himself” (Mt 27:42) He had heard the crowds crying, “Crucify him, crucify him”. He was abandoned by his disciples who all but one ran away. And he even felt abandoned by his Father – “My god, my god why have you forsaken me”. (Mt 27:46)

The darkness over him reflected the darkness invading his spirit. He knew the depths of being abandoned and lost in a world of pain and anguish.

Yet Jesus’ own spiritual darkness did not have its final say. He would issue a final prayer of trust and surrender: “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit”. (Lk 23:46) From the depths of his spirit arose a prayer, a prayer of total abandonment in trust.

What is important is that it was a prayer. Jesus reached out from the midst of his personal darkness to the One who could save him. He did not succumb to the darkness. He did not let go of hope. His cry from the hill of Calvary shot up to the heavens. And it was heard.

There is one answer to the human experience of darkness, of despair, of loss of all hope. That answer is to reach out from the depths of our darkness to the one who can save us out of death.

Like the drowning Peter in the Sea of Galilee, we raise our hand and cry out, “Lord, save me”.

We know today that Calvary was not the end of the story. We know that in fact the light will triumph over the darkness. The Resurrection of the Lord on Easter morn is the declaration that light triumphs over darkness. Darkness does not have the final word. Light will always triumph over the dark. It is the very nature of light to dispel the darkness. Even a little flickering light dispels the darkness around it.

The Light of the Word, our Lord Jesus Christ, rose triumphant from the grave. And there is a message for each of us: no matter how difficult and painful a particular crisis in our life may seem light can triumph. Thus, we should never lose hope.

We turn to Jesus, now our risen Lord. He is ready to take our burdens and renew us in body, soul and mind. He is the resurrection and light.

We can become worn down by life and all the pressures we face in today’s society; we can be tempted to give up and opt out. The Resurrection of Christ is always testament to the fact that light will come out of the darkest of situations. Human suffering in whatever form it takes is never meaningless, even the suffering at life’s end. The human experience of dying is a profoundly personal journey that we all must take. To enter the dying process with faith and love makes it a spiritual journey to new life.

To believe in Christ is to always have hope. To believe in Christ who died and rose again is to live in the serene knowledge that the light will always rise out of the deepest darkness.

Archbishop Julian Porteous

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