

First Sunday in Advent  
December 3, 2017  
Fr. Rick Lorenz

## Reflection

You probably noticed the Christmas decorations that have appeared since last week. Volunteers put them up yesterday after the Mass for Our Lady, as other parishioners prayed before the Blessed Sacrament in the chapel. Another volunteer set up a Christmas tree in the rectory, but the lights didn't work. He tried plugging in the wires with different combinations but without luck. It reminded me the Christmas Vacation movie with Chevy Chase. He wanted to make a perfect Christmas for the family, and this meant having enough lights up to burn out the local power station. Everything was set, and he threw the switch, but nothing. He tried and tried, suffering mightily during the cold of the night, but only when his wife threw a different switch did the lights come on. And it was glorious moment! It lasted until he noticed his least favourite relative unexpectedly there admiring the show.

The Church labours in darkness awaiting the coming of Christ, surrounded by neighbours who don't believe. The division between those of faith and those without is nothing new. Isaiah asks, "Why, O Lord, do you make us stray from your ways and harden our heart, so that we do not fear you?" The answer lies in original sin. Due to the sin of Adam, we are left in a state of ignorance; a peculiar ignorance that knows so much but has trouble remembering the simplest truths.

Is 63:16-17, 64:1, 3-8  
Ps 80  
1 Cor 1:3-9  
Mk 13:33-37

We can know the existence of God from the proof of creation, but can instead convince ourselves that "what is" can "be" without a cause to "make it so." The shocking complexity of a single cell eludes us, so we take an entire biosphere for granted. From the perspective of the user, life operates so easily. You eat and you live. Never mind the weird chemicals within that turn food into fuel for the body. You plant a seed and up comes a bean stalk. You marry a wife and out comes a child. Complexity is masked by simplicity. "We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand." Life conceals its origin in God, even while making it plain. So Isaiah wished for a sign to convince the people that God exists; something outside the predictable order, something beyond the familiar. "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence." God the Father sent his Son and he worked signs, but it turns out that miracles are not enough. Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes, but thousands walked away. In the last 25 years, the Blessed Sacrament has turned into distressed cardiac flesh with AB blood in Poland, Argentina and Mexico. I believe with others that it's the Sacred Heart of Jesus, whom we believe is present in the Eucharist. This evidence shows up on facebook newsfeeds, but church doors are not bursting open.

To know the unknowable needs something more precious than the finest laboratory, keener than the sharpest scope, brighter than the Christmas lights of Clark Griswold. Knowing God needs the light of faith, and it's the blackest light of the darkest night. With eyes shut to distracting sights, ears closed to confusing noise, faith illumines within a heart reflecting purity in silence and peace. It's the work of God, which we allow. "Restore us, O God; let your face shine that we may be saved." Like that movie I mentioned. It wasn't Clark shaking wires and checking bulbs, but something out of sight and beyond his control that gave power and dazzled his neighbours. And the Church has always been thankful for this gift of faith, and others too. "I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind."

We do have a part to play as well, a responsibility rooted in these gifts. Only the Father knows when Jesus will return in glory, so he tells us, "Keep alert. Keep awake." This is not a command to drink black coffee. He's saying that we will need faith to join him. He says, "You do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn." These are times of shifting darkness, and St. John of the Cross speaks of the dark night of faith. In this analogy, the fading twilight of evening lets us perceive God indirectly. Our senses encounter his creation and it suggests his agency, his existence, truth, beauty and love.

The breaking light of morning lets us know God directly. He infuses the soul with contemplation, a fleeting but overwhelming glimpse of his presence within. But in between is the dark night of faith. Then we have to choose to believe, apart from the unstable foundation of experience, and without having felt that conviction of divine union. It's a necessary stumble, feeling your way while touching nothing, halting awkward steps but only God knows how many, hoping and trusting in something you've heard, as only silence rushes in your ears.

Preserve your faith by moral choices that accord with the will of God. Make it grow by sharing it with others. Keep it actively engaged at each moment through diligence, moderation and trust. Through the grace of God, darkness will become light. "In the tender compassion of our God, the dawn from on high shall break upon us, to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace (Lk 1:78-79)."