

Scripture Reflections

Easter Vigil

Fire and Light



There are five readings included in the Easter Vigil Liturgy of the Word that make reference to fire and light. Fire and light are Christian symbols that have been with us on our communal faith journey with God that began thousands of years ago. One must see the light and feel the fire in order to capture the meaning of Christian living. These five daily Scripture reflections will help you to prepare yourself for the celebration of the Easter Vigil liturgy, or they could give you food for thought following the experience of the Easter Vigil liturgy.

Reflection One

Scripture Reading

Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. (Genesis 1:3)

Reflection

"Let there be light...." These are the first words that fall from the mouth of God in the Bible. These are the first words that we hear from God in our most sacred ritual of the year – the Easter Vigil liturgy! I often wonder why God did not begin with let there be love, or let there be life. I don't pretend to have an answer, but it is worth pondering. One must acknowledge that this light proceeding from God is not the light of the sun; we must wait three more days in the Genesis creation account for the invention of the sun. Is this the light of wisdom or the light of understanding? Is

light foundational to love and life? Are love and life not possible without light?

Creation begins with light. All beginnings are new creations. Does your day begin with light? Imagine what would happen if you began your day or even each new activity of your day with the quiet prayer, "Let there be light", rather than I'm dreading this day, or I just want to stay in bed, or I wish I had a new boss, or why do I have to do this, or why is my spouse so insensitive, or why can't my kids behave like other peoples' kids? For the rest of this week, let your beginning prayer be God's first words, "Let there be light". See what happens.

Reflection Two

Scripture Reading

Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. (Genesis 22:6)

Reflection

Isaac is Abraham's only son, and Abraham loves him deeply. In fact, this particular Scripture narration mentions Abraham's love for Isaac no less than three times, and this is the very first time that love is mentioned in the Bible at all. Imagine what must have been going through Abraham's mind as he carried the torch that would

light the fire that would apparently consume his beloved son's slaughtered body. Where is this light of God taking me? Abraham is being tested by fire, but there is a greater test yet to come for him. After Abraham believes with his whole heart that God wants him to slaughter his son as a sacrifice to God, will he have the courage to hear God's call at an even deeper level? God says in an apparent contradiction to the earlier command, "Do not lay your hand on the boy." This is light. If Abraham were entrenched in his conviction about God's will, he would have never heard the new message from God. Was this just a test? Did God change his mind? Perhaps Abraham was sinking into a deeper experience of God that changed him and how he understood God.

It takes great courage to see a new light and shed a conviction, especially a deep religious conviction, in light of new information. Do you have a religious conviction that is killing a relationship of yours? Perhaps the relationship is the seed of a new religious understanding for you.

Reflection Three

Scripture Reading

The angel of God who was going before the Israelite army moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and took its place behind them. It came between the army of Egypt and the army of Israel. And so the cloud was there with the darkness, and it lit up the night; one did not come near the other all night. (Exodus 14:19-20)

Reflection

Moses and the Israelites escaped slavery in Egypt and are on their way to the Promised Land, but things have gone sour and their past is catching up to them. They are now caught between a rock and a hard place; they can drown in the Red Sea before them,

or get destroyed by the Egyptian army behind them. God laid out the vision to Moses telling him to stretch out his staff over the Red Sea, and then God moved behind the Israelites to separate them from their dark past. In this dramatic scene, if the Israelites were to look behind them, they would see the presence of God as a pillar of light blinding them to the darkness of their enslaved history and pushing them forward into the water of freedom.

We all have a dark past to some extent. We are all enslaved by some particular darkness in our past. God has the power to shed light on that darkness and move us beyond the past into a future of freedom. Think quietly for a moment about some dark part of your own personal history. How is this darkness holding you back? Pray quietly and ask God to shed some light on this darkness. Sit quietly and listen until you hear God enlightening your darkness and nudging you ahead toward freedom.

Reflection Four

Scripture Reading

Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning. (Psalm 30:5b)

Reflection

On this fourth day of reflection, it should be clear that darkness and light have little to do with electromagnetic waves. Darkness is sin and light is grace. Sin blinds us to the truth about God, ourselves, and others. Sin leaves us in the dark realm of ignorance and division. Grace is the presence of God in our lives. Grace helps us to see the true goodness in ourselves and others. Grace is the light that lets us see all things in new and hopeful ways.

Is there a strained relationship in your life right now? Is it one over which you have some control? Is there sin in your heart blocking you from seeing the goodness of

this person and the possibility for a new way of relating? Pray that God's grace will guide you to a resurrected relationship with this person. Let your nighttime weeping be transformed into dawning joy.

Reflection Five

Scripture Reading

...the commandment of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes... (Psalm 19:8b)

Reflection

There is really only one commandment, and it has two parts: Love God and love your neighbor. This commandment is found in both the Old and the New Testaments and in all four gospels. Matthew, Mark, and Luke use very similar phrasing. Here is Luke who represents the more unified approach to the commandment among these three writers:

Luke 10:27: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.

John, who consistently emphasizes the unity between Jesus and his disciples, says it this way:

John 15:12: This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

The Gospel commandment to love draws little distinction between loving God and loving people. Divine power is released in every act of human love.

The Scriptures and the Church very generously spell out the details of love for us. All of the commandments, the parables, the teachings of Christ, and the moral traditions of the Church represent specific ways to love God by loving people. Even the doctrines of the Church that call us to be

respectful of the integrity of creation are set in the context of love for God and people. The details of how to love vary from person to person and situation to situation, but the commandment to love is clear and constant. It is our vision.

As you approach the Easter mysteries, you are challenged to examine the love of your life. There should be only one love of your life with two parts: Love God and love your neighbor. If all of your activity is not inspired by this love and leading you back to this love, then it should be clear to you what you need to do to become more loving. Do your priorities represent a love for the people God has given to you, or have you placed your love somewhere else? The commandment of the Lord is crystal clear, and it gives light to your eyes to help you see where you need to go.

