

*"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness, on them light has shined"*

For ancient people when survival was at stake, "darkness and light" had different meanings than for us. For them it was all about survival. For us words of darkness and light have more to do with convenience.

For ancients light in the darkness meant predators were kept at bay and cycle of daytime warmth and life had returned.

For us, it is less significant for we are so used to artificial light and warmth that we don't always pay attention and miss the good news that this promise brings.

Our call is to hear this passage from a survival mentality, rather than the indifference of assuming "light" is no big deal for modern people.

This weekend, we can relate to lack of light and warmth from the sun. But what is this text supposed to mean for people of faith? Yes, Jesus is LIGHT of the World. We believe that, but how does that change our living?

*First, begin by understanding that the gift of Light is a gift with many layers. It attracts and it changes. It warms and it reveals. It shines out! It shines in! It is the power of creation, and yet sometimes it is under our control.*

If we follow the 'light' we will discover where it has come from. And when we learn of its source, we begin to understand its purpose.

If we carry a light it will change the appearance of anything it touches. We can keep shadows at bay and darkness can be erased.

As people of faith, hear this promise of Isaiah with all that we have mentioned, and with the awareness that there is more!

Jesus, the Light of the World, LEADS us to God. Not by our wisdom or by chance, but by God's grace. Anyone can trace a light to its source, and if we walk toward God's light we will get closer and closer to God.

But that can only happen because Jesus has bridged the darkness with the light of his presence and love.

And, because Light illuminates, with God as our gift, the shadows of a broken world don't seem so scary, and the darkness (even of death) is chased away. Embraced by the light we are blessed to reflect that Light.

Like many new age variants, Eastern religions teach a concept called "awareness." They insist that if one can just manage to "wake up" and become truly aware of the world, and the presence of God within it, anyone can live wisely and faithfully.

A priest named Anthony de Mello attempted to use that concept in his missionary work in India. His contact with Eastern religions brought insight to his own writings on Christian spirituality.

He compared faith to waking up from the darkness of sleep. He said people outside of faith, "even though they don't know it, are asleep. They're born asleep, they live asleep, they marry in their sleep, they breed children in their sleep, they die in their sleep without ever waking up."

Easter religions talk about "enlightenment" as the goal of spirituality – or waking up. However, like most human philosophies, this is dependent on using one's own reason or strength to wake up, and make sense of life. But humanity has its limits and the shadows of selfishness, disease and death, show the brokenness of our efforts.

As Christians, we believe God has come to us like an alarm clock. He wakes us up. He shines light into our tightly closed eyes. He chases away the shadows. He wakes us up and leads us into the dawn of a new day. He doesn't wait for us to find the light, He is the Light and he comes to us!

Easter morning was the greatest wake-up call ever. Death, the eternal sleep, became the first morning of an eternal day. Despite the shadows and darkness of a broken world, Jesus has brought power to life and darkness to light.

Faith is opening our eyes to that Light and following it to its source. Faith is taking that light of faith that is given to us as a gift and making that Light OUR light, intentionally shining it into the darkness around us as, Jesus has done for us.

You know what it is like to have to wake up when you are tired. Or when it is cold outside. Or when you don't want to face a new day.

Waking up can be hard to do. And that (unfortunately) is a reality for the many people around us who think they are awake, but in fact are walking in their sleep or trying to get through life on their own.

No wonder there is so much fear of the darkness and such frustration at not being able to chase shadows away. No wonder there is so much anger, resentment, and blindly stumbling in the darkness.

Our gathering in the cold and darkness of winter can serve as a great illustration of what this all means.

In a week or so we will celebrate that great “religious festival” called Ground Hog Day. We know if the groundhog sees its shadow it runs back and hides and the darkness of winter continues unabated. If it doesn’t see that darkness, it means winter is almost over.

We know that scientifically that is ridiculous, but what a parable and reminder of what we have been talking about. Like groundhogs, sin causes many to be more comfortable living in the shadows than confronting the light.

However Christ has changed the script, and now because of his light, there is nothing to frighten or overwhelm us, and we are confident to move forward into each new day ... whether the sun is shining or the clouds are overwhelming.

That is what Easter has done for us – in a perfect way – chased the shadows away. What good news this is.

We can look in neighborhoods or nations, in the eyes of children and adults, and we see two things – either darkness or light.

The world saw Good Friday and saw only darkness. On the other hand, we know that the shadow of the cross is where the spark of Easter’s bonfire began.

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How will that light flicker and sparkle and chase shadows in YOUR life?

And, more importantly, will you allow that LIGHT to ‘wake you up?’