

[Readings: Gn. 1:1-2:2; Ex 14:15-15:1, Is 54:5-14; Rom 6:3-1; Lk: 24:1-12]

Maybe it was because I was seated in a particular place. Regardless, I cannot forget the sight. It was during the Easter Vigil several years ago. It was at night. All was dark. The lights in the church were turned off. The paschal candle had been brought into the church with all the majesty of the wondrous Holy Saturday liturgy, and, as is fitting, tapers burning with flames taken from the paschal candle had been used to light small candles held in the hands of all the people in the congregation.

At the moment I remember so vividly, and movingly, everyone had a lighted candle. I noticed the candles, of course, since they were the lights in an otherwise darkened church. Most of all, however, most of all, I remember the faces of the congregation. Each and every face was aglow. It was not an utterly brilliant shade of sharp, unadulterated light, piercing and unforgiving, revealing every blemish and every line on any face. Rather, it was soft, gentle, and warm, but gloriously bright in a special, marvelous way. The light fixtures above were shaped like orbs, reflecting the candle light as if they were all over the world!

For me, the sight was a lesson. The origin of light for each of the small candles was the fire atop the great paschal candle. I had solemnly blessed this fire at the beginning of the ceremony. It was God's fire.

The candle itself was large, strong, tall and imposing, festooned with the symbols of the Passion. On purpose, the great paschal candle represents Jesus, the Light of the World, the light shining in the darkness, breaking through the fog, destroying the power of night, bringing direction to any and all who stumble and fall, unable to see the path through life.

It is the symbol of the Lord, in whose wounds we are healed, by whose Crucifixion we are redeemed, whom we encounter, Risen, body and blood, in the Eucharist. The glow on each face was a lesson. The light of Christ brightens us all. It is more healing and complete than any cosmetic.

Absorbed by this holy light, our faces radiate with the sunshine of the Lord. We are evident and visible. We are clean and fresh. We are open and free.

We are alive because of Christ, and in Christ. He fills us with divine strength and grace.

Those faces that I saw that night, all receiving and then reflecting the brilliance and wonder of Christ, all victorious over the dark, told me that this is what Christians, each of us, are and should be. Christ is our light, as the Easter Vigil ceremony thrillingly and confidently had proclaimed to one and all.

Christ transforms us, if we allow it. In the Lord, the wayward find the right direction for their lives. The hard-hearted become inviting and kind. The desperate find hope. Everything is clarified for the confused. Nothing is hopeless. Hope is well-founded. Joy is to be expected. Life, not death, is the great fact of living.

A question came to my mind. When others see ME, do they see the warm, firm light of Christ gleaming in MY face? When I see others, especially people less appealing to me, whose customs or circumstances are unfamiliar to me, do I see on THEIR faces the image of the Lord?

The mystery of the Incarnation, so utterly fundamental to the Christian faith, insists that even in the very worst beings -- the sinful and the despised -- Jesus is there. If nothing else, our very humanity links us with Christ. He is there in the divinity that created us, individually and with love.

Every Holy Week, I remember an elderly nun who told me, "Father, I live for the Easter Vigil." I know what she meant. What concrete lessons it teaches us so well. This Holy Saturday, I pray: "God, show us the light. Make us shine with your light."

Our Easter gift to you this year is a book entitled "Why I Love Being Catholic." It is edited by Matthew Kelly, of Dynamic Catholic fame. These days that isn't something you hear very often, especially in light of the scandalous behavior of some of our members, our clergy and our hierarchy.

"Why I Love Being Catholic" shows the vast majority of Catholics who still love their Church, and who still remember all the great treasures of liturgy, art, education and medicine given by Catholic institutions over the centuries.

The writers are people just like you: they've laughed, cried, suffered, and celebrated their way through all the ups and downs of life. Some have been Catholic all their lives; others have taken a longer route home. All, however, can speak to the amazing gift that the Catholic faith has been in their lives.

These days, it's challenging to be a Catholic. The collection of entries in "Why I Love Being Catholic" celebrates the best of the Catholic faith, highlights the everyday miracles taking place all around us, and reminds us that there are thousands of everyday heroes out there who dare to have big dreams for the Church. Even amidst the challenges of our times, holiness is possible, grace abounds, and there is every reason to live our lives with hope! Enjoy reading it!

Thumb through the book and let the Holy Spirit stop you on the right pages. Walk out of your private cave, stretch out your tired and weakened spiritual muscles and take a deep breath of fresh Holy Spirit air. There IS reason to hope and to celebrate a Happy Easter! That it's worth celebrating and calling it Resurrection Sunday. And then, healed, raised and cleaned off, we can become the Divine Word News Service, and share that Good News with those who need to hear it. "Tell us, what did you see?" "Let me tell you!" Alleluia! And AMEN!