

Christmas Eve Homily 2010

Tonight is the night when we appreciate light the most. And discover light. Our house physicist has taught me aspects to the science of light. Every church ought to have a house physicist.

We cannot touch light unless it is concentrated into a beam. Thank you for the magnifying glass of Bethlehem (even if this Jesus burns at times).

We cannot see light, but by the light source, which is separate from us, we see. By our retina, we (who can) absorb the light that comes from the source – Sun, candle, light-bulb, Son – for the sensation of sight. We see others because the light reflected by you enters our eye and is absorbed. We absorb your shine.

It comes a certain relief to recognize that I am not the source. If I have any fire at all it is because of the sun. Science affirms it: the sun's energy is the source of all earthly light.

I am not the source but am the reflector.

A perfect reflector, a perfect mirror, will produce an image of the source with the same luminescence or brightness as the source. Of course, a perfect mirror is imaginary, unnatural.

So we natural ones muster up the faith to do our best -- as smudgy, as rumped, as dented as we all are. However inadequate we may be, the light still reflects.

This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine.

The Source is constant, we aren't

I flicker too much...

I, mere candle, build up too much wax in my life and drown the flame. Nor do I particularly like the fact that the price of being a candle is that I must melt; I must give up myself for this light to shine.

Darkness cannot snuff out the light. Darkness lacks such capacity.

But the stirring winds of hatred, negativity, callousness, they can gust and snuff out the flame.

Our hurts, antagonisms, our teeth-clenched defensiveness can blow it out.

So too our fears from risking to love, risking care, risking compassion, the failure to forgive.

So too our failure to walk in other's shoes and feel their hurt and loneliness, refusing to step out of ourselves and see the world from their eyes.

Or then the tears of sadness and loss rain upon the frail flickering flame.

Leaving us all in the dark.

Only the absence of light keeps us in darkness.

You cannot fight darkness with darkness. No more than anger can counter anger. I require the re-kindling that results when waxy me comes toward the source and leans toward the fire. I must come to it. I must bend.

Funny thing about candles – they cannot ignite themselves.