

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time A

I'm sure that we have all heard someone sing: *"This little light of mine....I'm gonna let it shine!"*

It might be hard to believe, but I know a large group of people, who in the darkness, avoid letting their lights or anyone else's shine at all.

The other night I ran into some friends I know from the local astronomy club. We had first met some 15 years ago, by chance, at the Nebraska Star Party which Judy sometimes refers to as "Nerd-Vana".

In her defense, it is the only place I have ever been where you could ask around for a slide-rule and actually find one. For the younger people here, a slide rule was what some of us used to do math equations before a small calculator was available.

It is also the only place I've ever felt comfortable asking for a slide-rule.

Anyway, this star party is an annual gathering of over 300 amateur and professional astronomers at a remote camp site on Merritt Reservoir, about 35 miles South of Valentine. Like any type of convention, we gather as a group united by a common purpose.

Ours was to stay up all night under a pristine Moonless sky for a whole week hunting down very faint little fuzzy galaxies and such in some very nice telescopes.

An odd dynamic of a star-party is that sometimes you need a break and so you might wonder around asking to look through telescopes that belong to people you have never met before.

We are veritable strangers in the night.

If you arrive after dark and set up your scope, you may well not know who your neighbors are.

Most of the conversations, even with these strangers, primarily consisted of such phrases as “Can I borrow one of your extraordinarily expensive pieces of equipment because I’m too cheap to get my own.....” and “Can you spare a cup of coffee?”

Astronomers use dim red flashlights because red light preserves the adaptation your eyes have made to darkness so that you can see all of those faint little fuzzy objects. Any other type of light instantly destroys our night vision. And so, we are also strongly united, in our dislike of bright lights during observing.

We take this very seriously, with surprising reactions to people who do anything from lighting a match to sitting on their car keys and setting off their car alarms with flashing headlights that shine in our faces.

And when someone does that three times in one night.....well....let’s just say I didn’t think that people who carried slide-rules could get so angry.

And, no..... it wasn’t my car....I was off looking for a cup of coffee and something expensive to borrow.

But it was in the light of the day that we got to know each other better and found that most of us were united by any number of other things. We were teachers, bankers, Harley bikers and cab drivers..husbands and wives and kids... not just astronomers.

In the light of day, we quickly found out who had the best equipment, and who brought a metal detector to help find that guys keys, but we also learned who made the best eggs, told the best jokes and who you might want to set your scope up with that night because you genuinely liked their company.

I realized that in the dark of night, we were congenial strangers, but in the light of day we became a community of friends.

And isn't it like in our everyday lives?

Darkness and Light are continually a part of who we are.

We know that we all have places in us that are darkness.

And like astronomers, there are times we don't really want to be disturbed by light.

Sins, habits, addictions and behaviors that we think are ours alone, but we might be willing to share with another.

Light distracts and interrupts us in what we would rather be doing. It might even anger us.

And we really don't want it to show us who we choose to stand next to, in the dark.

But like the dawn, light always comes, doesn't it?

Isaiah says today that *the people who sit in darkness have seen a great light..* He does not put this statement in the future tense, but rather that the light is already here. That was Matthew's very point in repeating the prophesy.

As Christians, we understand that the great light is Jesus Christ. He is the light of hope and the Light of Redemption. Of Justice and Peace. The light of Salvation and the of Light of Reason. He is the light that not only breaks through the darkness, but also dispels it.

And once we have had THIS light shone into our lives, living in the darkness is really no longer a viable option.

The objects and people that we might have seen with a little non-threatening red light, now become more clearly illuminated and we can see them for what they are.

It is in the Light that we form real and healthy friendships.

It is in the Light that community becomes alive.

It is in the Light that Love becomes more than a part of our senses.

It is in the Light that trust and empathy can be experienced.

And we, hopefully, come to realize that light is better than dark.

In faith we know this..... but in the reality of our lives, we can..... and do return to the darkness.

But today we are reminded that we do not have to stay there, that the Light is always shining.

The Good News of Repentance and Forgiveness, that John the Baptist proclaimed.....Jesus continues to proclaim.

He proclaims it in our hearts through the Scriptures.

He proclaims it to our to our senses in the Sacraments.

He proclaims it through the successors of those first Fishers of Men, our Bishops.

He proclaims the Good News through each one of us, because, indeed we are all fishers of men and women of all nations and that the light is ours, forever.

We are reminded that “this little light of mine” as the children’s song says, is always illuminating us, but that it is not ours alone.

We are reminded that we must always, to the best of our abilities, shine it before us so that others do not have to stumble or remain in the dark.