

Abide in Christ

Battle Between Light and Darkness



Archbishop John C. Wester

In ancient Rome, these winter days marked a battle between light and darkness. The pagan mid-winter festival of *Sol Invictus* ("the unconquered sun"), marked a struggle of primitive forces in the cosmos. It was in 336 A.D. when the Christian Emperor Constantine transformed the secular pagan celebration and invested it with Christian meaning. This is why the Church celebrates the birth of Christ on the twenty-fifth of December. Nature itself testifies to the Light of Christ born into our world, a world "in sin and error pining" as the hymn tells us. Even so, the timeless evil that led Herod to massacre the Holy Innocents has not gone away. Sin, with

all its evil deceptions, plagues us even to this day. Advent is a time of preparation, a time of vigilance, of watchful waiting. We peer into the darkness of our world to behold a light, the flickering flame of Faith. In the birth of Christ, "a new and glorious morn" has broken upon humankind. Long imprisoned by sin and error, we have been given new hope. In the birth of this innocent child, born in vulnerability, born amid political uncertainty, we see the promise of salvation. Strangely, the wooden manger foreshadows the wood of the cross, His swaddling clothes the burial shroud of His Resurrection. Here we find a difficult lesson for our own age, for our culture is so preoccupied with itself, a society breaking down before our very eyes. Theologians have pondered why God chose to be born into the corrupt human condition, why God chose to enter into the suffering of humankind. So we too must ponder.

In these past few months, I too have prayed and reflected upon the deepest mystery of the Incarnation. These past months we as a Church have had to confront the evil of betrayal, of false pride, of corrupt greed. As difficult as it is to understand, I have

come to see God's favor not in moments of strength but in our weakness. It has been in the suffering of the innocent, in the painful accounts of men and women whose courage and grace have touched me deeply. First and foremost, it has been the victim survivors of sexual abuse whose struggles have touched my heart. I am humbled by their example of courage and fidelity since many of them, in spite of their woundedness, still have a profound love of the Church, who still see Christ beyond their hurt. They have shown to me a love that mysteriously is able to forgive. In a somewhat different way, in the anguished faces of countless parishioners, who remain faithful even though everything around them tells them to leave, I have encountered a love that remains amid the doubts. In the fidelity of good priests in the archdiocese who themselves feel betrayed yet still venture into a world of despair and broken-heartedness, I have seen the face of Christ. In my personal prayer and the dark nights of my soul, I have been made aware of the profound dimension of faith that defies the reason and logic of our secular age. The message of this holy season, the Advent

readings for Mass, the hymns and religious carols, and the timeless story of God's love for us, defies all reasonable explanation, all rational proof. Light and darkness, good and evil, life and death confound us all. The lowly manger wherein the babe was born, the cross upon which the son of God suffered and died, makes no sense. Why? In our sinfulness, in our brokenness, in our flawed humanity, why was Christ born for us? The incomprehensible truth of God is that Christ and His Church are where the hope of healing dawns in our darkness, there we encounter, like Thomas, the wounds of redemptive love and our struggle to learn the lesson of divine love.

As we continue to discover the true meaning of Christmas, as we set aside the deception of our being perfect, as we discover the wounds we have tried to hide from those around us, we comprehend that it is all too much to bear alone. Only then are we able to learn the lesson of Christmas. Sadly, it is a lesson our secular age cannot grasp, a lesson that greed and pride distort, a lesson that power and privilege count as folly. The lesson is this: Only those who've been wounded know what it means to heal, only those who confess their sins will ever receive forgiveness, and only those who allow Christ to be born in their hearts, will ever know eternal life. Emmanuel - "God is with us!"

Sincerely yours in the Lord

+ John C. Wester

Most Rev. John C. Wester,
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*His Mercy
Endures Forever*

