

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time | For Sunday, November 8, 2020

The Light and the Dark

Written by Br. John-Marmion Villa

Wisdom 6:12-16

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

OR 4:13-14

Matthew 25:1-13



Recently, I was taking photographs of our small chapel here at the monastery. As a novice photographer, I find myself challenged to find new angles to create fresh compositions. I decided to focus on the Chapel when it was lit during the day by sunlight and then again in the evening light of the moon. What I found was quite insightful!

The daytime photo is something that you might expect to find, spring flowers bursting with life in the morning sun, perfectly framing the exterior façade of the chapel. The evening photo was quite different, the full moon was casting shadows of the trees everywhere; I decided to open the double doors of the Chapel and to turn on the interior lights. The eyes of the viewer are immediately drawn to the light piercing through the darkness of twilight to the warm invitation coming from the Chapel.

In our [Gospel text](#), it is midnight when the cry is heard (v. 6a). It is dark outside, and the wedding party falls asleep (v.5). These two details — midnight and sleep — are frequently spoken of in monastic spirituality. They describe the same reality: *hesychia* is often translated as sacred stillness. This nighttime stillness of soul puts to sleep the ever-restless cravings of our five senses which has a tendency to be dominated by the present culture of immediate gratification and sensory stimulation. When the cravings are tempered, the soul is more apt to perceive the deeper realities of the sacred mysteries, which are oftentimes described as being enshrouded in a darkness.

How can we learn to temper our five senses, then, in order to help our souls be more attentive to the arrival of the Bridegroom (v.6b)?

1. [The Jesus Prayer](#), often found in Eastern Christian literature, the constant repetition of the phrase, “Lord Jesus, son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner,” can have a dual effect. It can calm our agitation, and it can focus our attention. Learning to pray The Jesus Prayer with a trusted guide can be a helpful tool in learning how to remain calm and focused throughout the day.

2. Ascetical Practice, this is nothing more than learning how to say “no” to pleasures and desires which are illicit. It’s not that our desires or pleasures are bad or immoral, it’s rather that they can seductively dominate or crowd out time and space for prayer. If we are unable to say “no” to them, we can find ourselves enslaved by these pleasures through our rationalized excuses for them.

3. Love in action. I read this recently, “A study from Yale said the best way to deal with stress is to do a small act of generosity for someone else.” Our stress levels can be diminished when we diffuse someone else’s stress. This is difficult for us, indeed, but not impossible! This difficulty that we all experience is the Titanic-sized effort to shift the focus of our lives away from “me” and onto “you.” In this way, we can become the hands and feet of Jesus wherever we go.

When I see the two photos laying side by side, I am inspired by the one I took in the evening because of the light that is shining out. I have imagined and prayed that my life could look more like that, a warm, inviting light that shines into the darkness, out onto others from within my soul. But it is not my light that I created myself, it is the light of Jesus’ love shining upon me and through me. In order for this light to be received and shared, there needs to be a darkness. A paradox ensues, the darker the night of our senses, the brighter the light of Jesus’ love can shine through.

Br. John-Marmion Villa

PRAYER

One dark night,
fired with love’s urgent longings
— ah, the sheer grace! —
I went out unseen,
my house being now all stilled.

In darkness and secure,
by the secret ladder, disguised,
— ah, the sheer grace! —
in darkness and concealment,
my house being now all stilled.

On that glad night,
in secret, for no one saw me,
nor did I look at anything,
with no other light or guide
than the one that burned in my heart.

(excerpt of [The Dark Night](#), poem by St. John of the Cross)