

Fr. Charles Puthota's Blog

July 24, 2022

From the Pastor's Desktop



Dear Parishioners of St. Elizabeth,

BETTER THAN LIGHT

"I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year: 'Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown!' And he replied: 'Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God.

That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way.'"

Minnie Louise Haskins (1875-1957) in "God Knows"; quoted by King George VI during his broadcast to the UK at the outbreak of World War II.

Reflection: Jesuit Father John F. Kavanaugh narrates an unforgettable encounter he had with Mother Teresa. Volunteering years ago for a month at the "house of the dying" in Calcutta, India, he waited on the first day after the early morning mass to meet with her. When she appeared and wanted to know what she could do for him, he requested her to pray for him. Mother Teresa wanted to know what she should pray for. John said, "That I may have clarity." She refused to pray for that intention. Taken aback, John persisted, "But you always seem to have clarity." She laughed and said, "I have never had clarity; what I have always had is trust. So I'll pray that you trust."

Mother Teresa herself was not free from lingering doubts and gloomy confusion. The dark night of the soul was to be her constant companion. It wasn't always the dawn on the horizon of her soul. She had to take one step at a time. If she had had clarity, there was no need for her trust. Faith and trust are necessary because we do not see clearly and cannot pick our way without seeming to miss our footing.

This is precisely what we see in the book "Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light. The Private Writings of the 'Saint of Calcutta'". Compiling chronologically her private correspondence with various people, the book highlights the fact that Mother Teresa had to deal with darkness and the absence of God for over fifty years. Her interior struggles were characterized by spiritual desolation and dryness, loneliness, emptiness, and pain. For example, she wrote, "There is so much contradiction in my soul, no faith, no love, no zeal.... I find no words to express the depths of the darkness.... My heart is so empty....so full of darkness... I don't pray any longer. The work holds no joy, no attraction, no zeal.... I have no faith, I don't believe." Through her conversations with her confessors, however, she came to the conclusion that despite her desert experience and inner turmoil, God was calling her to continue to serve the poorest of the poor. In her inner suffering, she identified with all those who suffer and ultimately with Christ himself.

Her launching out into the new religious order was filled with doubts and uncertainties. Things did not move at the pace any reasonable person would have wanted. Even after the new Order "Missionaries of Charity" was established, the path was strewn with obstacles and hurdles that the only way of survival for her was to continue to trust. Without that trust, she couldn't have lived through another day with strength and courage. Through inner struggles and external obstacles, which made life uncertain and unclear, through the trials and tribulations, Mother Teresa kept trusting and longing for God.

We strive for clarity. Rational minds seek lucidity. We want to carry a light so we can tread safely into the dark unknown. No matter what lights we may carry, we will still have the unknown in our lives as it is part and parcel of our lives to live without knowing how things are going to turn out. That's why we have to put our hand into the hand of God and walk boldly into the unknown. The trust we put in God, even though everything might seem bleak and dreary, will give us strength to deal with the darkness of life. That trust is actually better than the light we can have; it is safer than the known way.

Jesus too faced this element of the unknown. Life was confusing and overwhelming for him. He didn't know his future clearly. He was human like us in everything but sin. He couldn't understand always why he had to suffer and die a cruel and undeserving death. He felt abandoned and forsaken. He was tempted to flee from terrible suffering and death. Even though he prayed, "let this cup pass from me," he did not want the unknown and uncertain taken away from his life. Instead, he put his trust in his loving Father, knowing that that was the best and safest way for him to deal with the dark and dangerous challenges of life.

Action: Appreciate the truth that no matter where and what you are, you will have to deal with darkness, uncertainty, and the unknown outside of yourself and inside of your soul. Instead of wishing them away, learn to take God's hand in yours, like a child takes his mother's, and face boldly what life brings. As you become aware of the causes of anguish and anxiety, let the trust you have in God lead you through the night and the storms.

Your Friend and Pastor,

Father Charles Puthota