

MONDAY, DECEMBER 14

DO YOU SEE THE WIDE NIGHT SKY?

The darkness comes early for the Northern Hemisphere this time of year. In New York, the sun will begin setting at 4:30 p.m. and it will be fully dark by 6:09 p.m. Of the 24 hours we have today, only nine of them will be graced with the light of the sun. What of the remaining 15 hours? What of the time when we are shielded by darkness? Beyond being a backdrop for our candles and Christmas lights, what is the gift of darkness?

Too often we equate darkness as being negative, lacking or even sinister. Meanwhile light is equated with purity, positivity and goodness. Yet, darkness comes with its own goodness and offers its own gift. Darkness invites us to look again at the world around us; to view it with keener eyes. Consider how the security of darkness shields those fleeing injustice and persecution, how it creates safe passage for enslaved people running for freedom. Think of the ways in which the shade of a tree provides respite from the blaze of a summer sun, or how patients can settle into rest when the lights are finally turned off.

Yes, we wait for Christ, who is the light of the world, but we do not wait alone. The psalmist sings of the protection and comfort found in the “shadow of the Almighty” (Psalm 91:1) and the “shadow of God’s wings” (Psalm 17:8, 36:7, 63:7). Hiding in a cave, Jesus’ ancestor, King David,



prays: “For my soul takes refuge in You; And in the shadow of Your wings I will take refuge until destruction passes by.” (Psalm 57:1) Even in the shadows of darkness — perhaps especially — God waits with us.

Today the church celebrates Saint John of the Cross, a Sixteenth Century Carmelite Spanish mystic whose poem “The Dark Night” provides a beautiful metaphor for the intimacy of our relationship with God. Under the protection of darkness, the soul steals out into the night to find its beloved who is God. The poet writes, “O guiding night! O night more lovely than the dawn! O night that has united the Lover with his beloved.” It is in the vast intimacy of the dark night that we can bring to God all that we are, all that we need and all that we hope for.

In the darkness of this Advent, after the many cruelties and stresses of this year, what do you seek? What pains and hopes can you entrust to the one who loves you in today’s 15 hours of darkness?

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