

A television ad I've seen recently promotes a vitamin supplement which strengthens lutein, a necessary nutrient for good eye health. The ad states that the human eye has the ability to see the light of a single candle (presuming an environment of total darkness) at a distance of ten miles, approximately the length of 150 football fields. This caused me, conversely, to reflect on the power of light. The presence of light, no matter how small or fragile, vanquishes darkness' hold on anything.

In today's Gospel, Jesus meets a man "blind from birth" (Jn. 9:1) sitting by the Pool of Siloam in the outer court of the Temple in Jerusalem. His life is wrapped in total darkness. John the evangelist has Jesus use the man's physical blindness as a metaphor for an equally total state of spiritual darkness. Disregarding his disciples (and later the Temple officials) arguments trying to link the man's physical blindness to personal sin, or a punishment for the sin of his parents, Jesus proceeds to make a mud-paste poultice and apply it to the man's eyes. He then sends the man to plunge himself into the Pool of Siloam by which he sat for so many years and wash the poultice from his eyes. Doing so, the man's blindness ends. He can now see. But his seeing is not just the receiving of physical sight (miraculous as that is). He has also experiences an even greater grace, the grace of "insight", faith, and acting on this grace, professes belief in Jesus as the "Light of the world" (Jn. 9:5), the definitive revelation of the person and work of God in human life and human affairs.

In the encounter between Jesus and the blind man is revealed every believer's journey and reception of the gift of faith through the Sacrament of Baptism.

In the sacrament of baptism the one washed in its waters enters into union with Jesus and receives the light of faith. This is symbolized in the giving to the newly baptized (or in the case of children the parents and godparents) a lighted candle. This candle, kindled from the large Paschal or Christ Candle (itself lit from fire kindled in total darkness at the beginning of the church's celebration of Jesus' Resurrection on Easter Night through which the darkness of sin and death are again vanquished). Like the

man born blind, every baptized person has been set free from the darkness of sin and unbelief and is called to walk as a child of the light as St. Paul reminds us.

Following his “coming into the light” the man in the Gospel publicly witnesses to the person and presence of Jesus in his life. He becomes a missionary, an evangelist. Like the formerly blind man in the Gospel, the gift of the light of faith is given us not just for our personal sanctification. We, too, are called to mission, to witness what God has done, and continues to do in the world, through Jesus. Jesus commands us that we are not to hide the light of faith but to let it shine before others so that “seeing your good deeds they may glorify your heavenly Father” (Mt. 5:16).

Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation ***The Joy of the Gospel*** reiterates this fundamental demand of our baptism. Over this past year the parish staff, all our councils, commissions and committees have been reading and discussing ways each of us is called to fulfill this mandate. We’ve been reading the book, ***Forming Intentional Disciples*** by Sherry Weddell. I commend it to you for your reflection. Like that of Pope Francis, it is Weddell’s contention, that the future of the Church depends on each of us taking up our charge to be a light in the world environment in which each of us lives daily.

Being a light does not necessarily imply having to shine with the brilliance of a bank of klieg stadium lights, just a willingness to share whatever light we have with others. Remember, even one small light has the power to bring an end to darkness. Offering to pray for someone who is sick or troubled; taking time to sit and simply be a listening presence to another in their anguish or confusion; taking the risk of introducing yourself to someone here in the parish you do not know; a simple smile of recognition; sharing how your faith has impacted your life with another person who needs encouragement—these are just a few examples of how we can let our light shine. The Catholic organization known as “The Cristophers” has as its motto: “***It is better to light one little candle than to curse the darkness. If everybody lit just one little candle, how bright this world would be.***” For whom is each of us a “light shining in darkness”?