

The Light Shines in the Darkness

There are times in life when something shifts, and what used to be is no more. In the context of the workplace, for example, we enter a business cycle, driven by forces which we cannot control. Jobs are lost. Current business and future prospects decline. What worked in the past no longer seems effective or even relevant. Established values are questioned. The way forward appears obscure. It appears that God has abandoned us. This phenomenon has a name: the *Dark Night*.

The usual response to this phenomenon is to try and fix things. This is especially true when we lose our jobs. It is also true when companies face bankruptcy - or, if they still have straws to cling to, seek bankruptcy protection. Whether as unemployed person, or as an organization, everyone scrambles to find a way forward, confident that every problem is Christ's and our opportunity. But, trying to fix things and go forward is not the only response which helps. There is another way.

It helps to understand what the *Dark Night* is, and how God is present in it, even though everything is obscure. Christian experience with *Dark Night* invites us to recognize God's presence with us, even when we perceive that God is absent. Perceptions and reality are not always the same.

The reality is that God is always with us, even when our feelings suggest otherwise. God is with us, always. The purpose of life is to be with God in all things. The goal of life is to live with God, forever. The purpose and goal are God's, and God is infinitely more eager than even we are to protect them. In our *Dark Night* experiences, then, we can be encouraged that God is still with us. *Dark Night*, therefore is a holy place because God is with us.

In the *Dark Night*, God offers us choices and opportunities. We can choose to wobble through whatever crisis we are in on our own, and look for opportunities for the future. Or, we can ask God for help to discern what God is offering us at the moment, and where/how God is leading us toward the future. Even when our perceptions of God's presence are obscure, God is always present!

The New Testament says much about *Dark Night* experiences, although it doesn't use that expression. One line, in particular, stands out. John's Gospel (1:5) says, *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it* (John 1:5).

It means that Christ's light shines, no matter what! Light is mentioned only once, and darkness, twice, because darkness has to continue struggling to obscure Jesus and deflect his followers. But, that kind of darkness (evil) neither can nor will triumph. In Jesus' hands, *Dark Night* (the perception of God's absence), is a holy place where the light always shines. It is our opportunity to encounter God. God's will and activity in the *darkness* is to loosen whatever attachments we have that deflect or block us from close relationship with God. *Dark Night* is God's means to draw us closer to God.

Darkness can be scary, especially when it is new or includes pain - letting go, or having taken from us, our treasured priorities in life. Human beings, whether as individuals or groups, have inner programming to be wary when our perceptions and experiences are obscured and/or confused. How divinely ironic that Christ uses *Dark Night* as divine means to give us new opportunities to be and work with him!

We live in economic and political hard times. Pain and loss of public confidence in our economic and political systems claim many victims. Many of us live in darkness, unsure of what's happening in the present, and uncertain about the future. It helps to remember that God is present with us, always, and in every experience. *Dark Night*, in which we feel the loss of treasured attachments, is a holy place where we encounter Christ. In our *darkness*, Christ stands with us, holding out his wounded hands to uphold us, today, and lead us into tomorrow. The light really does shine in the darkness! Thanks be to God.

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