

22 March 2020—The 4th Sunday of Lent: Ephesians 5:8-14

Perhaps you've heard this brain teaser: "If a tree falls in the forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?" An interesting question because one's answer indicates how one perceives the 'place' of human beings in relation to other physical phenomena.

If you are not daydreaming by now, you may wonder what this has to do with the 4th Sunday of Lent. Here's why I bring up the tree in the forest: we humans like to think that we can do things, and no one will be the wiser, no one will be harmed if it's 'our little secret.' We believe, at times, that we can hide from God. If we fall in the forest, and no other human being is around, does our fall make a sound?

Part of the allure of certain behaviors is secretiveness. Whether the behavior is adultery, stealing, cheating or something as common as gossip, a large part of the attraction is the illusion that we are doing something "on the sly". There is something insulating and powerful in secret behavior. The irony of secretiveness and darkness is that, in a way, they work; for a few moments we feed our desire for control, entitlement and dominance. We live in the illusions about ourselves and others, being able in our secret selves to build a false reality of our own making. The more we seek such isolation, the more our minds and spirits are tormented by the assumption that we are alone, that no one cares, or possibly could care about us.

For Paul in Ephesians, we are not faced with a choice of the degree of light and darkness in our lives; we must choose between darkness and light. As we choose light, we choose the one who exposes the impotence of darkness: "*...when anything is exposed by the Light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is Light* (v 13). To live in the Light involves the willingness to expose all the darkness of sin within us to Christ. Yet we hesitate to believe that Jesus can both know us thoroughly and love us completely. The promise is that when we invite the Light to enlighten us, Jesus will transform our darkest darkness into light. Christ will not merely remove our sin and guilt, will not just destroy our shame and fear. Jesus changes guilt into blessing; makes our shame thanksgiving; transforms our sins into something beautiful for God. Jesus will make Light all that we have been, all that we are, and all that we ever will be.

"Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will give you Light (v 14). Paul is likely quoting a line from a very early hymn sung at Baptism. By doing so he gives us the true context in which the dawning light of grace comes. Baptism draws us into the intimate life of the Holy Trinity, and into the life of the faith community. Walking in the Light is an experience of love with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is a sharing in the Light with our sisters and brothers.

To walk in the Light involves giving ourselves *to* God, *with* our sisters and brothers. It involves both. The Enemy of our souls wants us to feel isolated, alone, helpless; to be fearful of being misunderstood or ridiculed or seen for what we really are. There are real risks. Some will use the failings of others to feel better about themselves; this is called narcissism; some will use others' sins as weapons to inflict further wounds; that is called sadism. Such things are sinful; using the failings of others for any purpose other than forgiveness and restoration only fosters more darkness. Narcissism, sadism, darkness and fear do not, cannot serve God's purpose. It is better to suffer misunderstanding and ridicule, better to be seen for what one really is, better to forfeit one's life, than to lose the Light of Christ. When it comes to sin, it is simplicity itself: confess your own, be silent about others'.

As we walk in the Light, we see more that God is Light, in whom there is no darkness at all. Our defenses and fears begin to crumble. We become more interested in loving life, than in protecting ourselves, especially at others' expense. We begin to see that the love of God in Jesus Christ is stronger, deeper, better than any deception, darkness, or secret. We become willing to be exposed to more of the truth about ourselves and others than we ever thought possible. And this truth does not make us afraid, truth fills us with joy because we are not alone or helpless. Our help is in the Name of the Lord. The

Light of truth guides us deeper into God's inexhaustible love for us. As Jesus embraces us with Light, we *want* to reach out to others, embracing them with Christ-Light, excusing their waywardness, forgiving them their sins, dwelling on their virtues, helping them on their journey deeper into Christ. There will arise the desire to know what the Light may show, walking in Light as children of Light, bearing the Light of Christ into every relationship and environment.

If you fall and no one is there to hear it, do you make a sound? Yes! Jesus Christ is present in the most barren places of human sin and alienation, in the heart of darkness. There is no place God is not. Jesus is always present, always longing to lead you and everyone out of darkness and sin into the Light of forgiveness, restoration and new life. Jesus calls to everyone: "*Sleeper awake! Rise from the dead, and I will give you Light!*" Amen.