

“...the people who sit in darkness have seen a great light...”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Once upon a time, tourists were visiting the famous Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico. It happened that, while they were below ground in a giant cave, the lights went out...utter blackness surrounded them. Among those trapped in this total-blackness were an eight-year-old boy and his five-year-old sister. The little girl began to cry. Her eight-year-old brother was heard to say,

“Don’t worry, Amy. There’s a man up there, who knows how to turn the lights on again.”

I share that story with you because it is a beautiful illustration of the prophecy of Isaiah in the first reading. It is the same prophecy Matthew applies to the coming of Jesus in today’s gospel:

**“The people who sit in the darkness will see a great light.
On those who live in the dark land of death, the light will shine.”**

You see, before the coming of Jesus, the world was dark ...and scary. It was very much like the Carlsbad Caverns when the lights went out. It was so dark and so scary that, in a sense, people began to cry. Into the midst of this terrifying situation came the reassuring voice of Isaiah.

The prophet promised the people that a great light would soon appear and take away the darkness. And Isaiah’s promise realized its fulfillment in the coming of Jesus.

Now, what happened to Israel, as a nation, happens to each one of us, individually! In other words, there are times in our lives when –the light seems to ...go out. We feel as though we are in complete darkness, not knowing what to think or which way to turn. We may feel frightened... like a five-year-old, left standing in a large, dark cavern. We become very... uncertain.

**At such times, “What are we to do?” you ask.
Well... I am glad you asked that question!**

*At such times, we need to know there’s someone up there who knows how to **turn the lights on**.*

For example, take Darryl Stingley. In the late 1970’s, he was sitting on top of the world, as a pro-football, wide-receiver for the New England Patriots (boo!). Then, one August afternoon, **IT** happened. In a pre-season game, he was viciously hit by Oakland Raiders safety, Jack Tatum...and the **‘light went out’** for Stingley. Tatum’s bone-crushing **‘hit’** left 27-year-old Stingley paralyzed from the chest down. Today, he can use only one hand, getting around in an electric wheelchair.

That August afternoon, **‘the light went out’** for Darryl Stingley—**BUT**, Darryl never gave up. He knew there was someone up there who could **turn the light back on**. He believed in the prophesy:

**“The people who sit in darkness will see a great light.
On those, who sit in the dark land of death, the light will shine.”**

*And when the light went back on for Darryl, it went on brighter than ever! Darryl is still confined to a wheelchair and unable to walk. **BUT**, he has a whole, new vision of himself and life.*

In an interview, he insisted that, in some ways, his life is better now than it was before.

“Then, I had tunnel vision. All I wanted... was to be the best athlete I could be ...and a lot of things were ... ‘overlooked.’ Now, I’ve come back to them.”

In another interview, Stingley was more explicit, saying the tragedy changed his life for the better, in a surprising, new way:

“This is a rebirth for me. Not only physically, **BUT...spiritually....
I really have a lot more meaning and purpose to live for now ...than ever before.”**

Those are incredible words from a man whose dreams of football stardom & wealth lie dead and buried... in an electric wheelchair. **BUT**, one hears the same kind of words from hundreds of other people, who have gone through similar periods of 'darkness' in their lives.

When the lights went on again for them, they went on brighter than ever.

And the same can be true for us!

Look: the death of a life-long spouse/dear friend, an unexpected rejection/betrayal by a loved one, a smashed dream of a business or career success, the loss of good health—all of these things can throw our lives into a complete tailspin and into total darkness.

BUT, when such tragedy strikes, we need only to remember a few things--

Like Isaiah's prophesy: **"The people who sit in darkness... will see a great light.
On those who live in the dark land of death, the light will shine."**

Like the little boy,
who told his frightened sister: **"Don't worry, Amy.
There's a man up there who knows how to turn the lights on again."**

Like Darryl Stingley, who said: **"This is a rebirth for me... I really have a lot more meaning and
purpose to live for now ...than ever before."**

And so, when the lights go on again for **us**—as they surely will—we will find that, with faith & trust in God ('the Man up there'), they will go on brighter than ever...for **then**, we will be older & wiser...
and... we will have the scars to prove it!

I will now close with these words, written by Cardinal Newman, while detained in Italy, awaiting his return to England. Having fallen ill and nearly dying, during his convalescence there, he wrote these lines on the right way to follow Jesus:

**"Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,
lead, Thou, me on!
The night is dark and I am far from home,
lead, Thou, me on!
Keep, Thou, my feet;
I do not ask to see the distant scene,--
One step... enough... for me."**

May Almighty God, our Abba, bless you...
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.