

DECEMBER 29, 2025 FATHER MICHAEL COUTTS

Through the Advent, we've been listening to Isaiah so often, and he said, "People who lived in darkness have seen a great light."

At Easter time, a deacon will hold a candle and will raise it and come in procession and sing, "Light of Christ," and people will say, "Thanks be to God." That Easter light began with the birth of Christ, and that light shines in our world today, and it is challenging you and me to come out of darkness into the light.

So, what is the fruit of this light? The fruit of this light is knowledge. Not knowledge of Scripture, chapter and verse, not knowledge of the Torah, not knowledge of rituals and tradition, but an intimate knowledge of Christ face-to-face – just like the thief at the crucifixion saw Jesus face-to-face and had a conversion experience.

When you have that conversion experience, there is a metanoia, a change of mindset, and also a change of heart. And it challenges us to live in a different way altogether. It challenges us to live according to the pattern of Christ.

If we are—if we see Christ face-to-face, then we are called to live according to the standards that he set. "Love one another as I have loved you." We are finite; Christ was infinite, but we are still called to reach that perfection. We are called to forgive, not once, not twice, not seven times, but 77 times. We are called to be ministers of peace.

And John tells us in that letter, if we have encountered Christ and we don't live according to his standards, then we are frauds, charlatans, a liar, he calls us in no uncertain terms.

If you read the letter of John, that first letter of John, you will notice that he uses the word "beloved" so very often. It sounded very syrupy and very mushy, and yet, John spoke these words out of a conviction. He says, if you and I are united, we are one in Christ, and Christ is in God. God loves the Son, and therefore, we are loved by God. "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Listen to him."

And not only that, but the fact that you and I live according to the laws of the Church, the laws of Christ, just being human beings to our utmost extreme, we are loved by others, as well. And therefore, to call one another beloved is not over the top, and it is not beyond what we are supposed to say.

So, how can we do it? We are doing it because of the gift of the Holy Spirit, John tells us in the letter. The Holy Spirit guides us. The Holy Spirit instructs us. The Holy Spirit tells us where to go.

It's the same Holy Spirit that brings Simeon to the temple when Mary and Joseph bring Jesus to be presented to the Lord according to the law that they had in their tradition. Now, we often think that Simeon was a priest, just like Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist. But he wasn't that. Luke simply tells us he was a devout Jew living in Jerusalem, who lived according to the Torah, kept the Sabbath, and obeyed the tradition, and lived in that hope that, one day, he would see the Messiah.

And a promise had been made to him by God, "You will not see death until you finally see the Messiah."

So, I'd ask you to picture yourself, Simeon coming to the temple and making a beeline to this young couple. He is guided by the Holy Spirit, and he offers to take the child in his arm. Can you imagine a young couple with their firstborn child and an old man coming and saying, "Can I hold your child?" We have that happening even now today.

People want to hold the newborn baby, and the mother often says, "No. His preciousness is to me. I don't know who you are. How can I hand it?"

And yet, as she looked at this man, there was a sense of aura around him, there was a sense of something great and beautiful. And so, what did she do? She hands the child over, and then he makes that famous prayer, which priests often use, or anybody who said the Breviary uses it every night at the night prayer.

"Now, Lord, you can let your servant go in peace, for my eyes have behold the Saviour, which you have made to me according to your promise." What a beautiful prayer, indeed. "And he will be there for the rising and the following of many in Israel."

Jesus, as soon as he comes into our presence, and you and I, who are united with Jesus, have to be constantly a challenge to the world around. Thomas Becket, whose feast we celebrate today, challenged Henry VIII to such an extent that he even had to lose his own life. Who will rid me of this troublesome priest? And they did.

God bless you all.