

Let Your Light Shine
1 Epiphany B
By Rev. Robert Lebron

Do you remember the first words said to you by your children? Or by a friend? First words are memorable and they say a lot about the person speaking. Neil Armstrong's first words as he set foot on the moon are memorable: "*That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.*" Alexander Graham Bell's first words spoken on the telephone in 1875: "*Mr. Watson, come here -- I want to see you.*"

In the first lines of Genesis we also have the first words of God. God commands light into being and from light, day and night, and morning and evening are established. Without light there can be no epiphany. Whether it be the dawn of creation or the church's season of Epiphany in which we celebrate Jesus' baptism and the visit of the Magi, physical and spiritual light are needed to understand God's activity in our lives.

"*Let there be light,*" are words that are good for us to hear now more than ever. They are words spoken not in a vacuum, or in syllables but are incarnated in the events of life, the books we read and the movies we see. The chances are, we are never totally in tune to the light. We are so focused on hearing what we want to hear that sometimes we are deaf to what is most important.

As we begin the journey of a New Year we are called to understand the separation of light from darkness within ourselves. At times the barrier between the two is permeable. The distinction is blurred. Sin swirls within the chaos and grey areas within us when we take advantage of the people around us, when we're affected by anger or burdened with the regrets and hurts of the past. The more darkness we allow in, the harder it will be to see the light of God. If we're finding our lives out of control, we can be sure that the swirling chaos of the darkness is holding us back from living lives that have meaning and purpose. Lives that are turned towards the light. God asks for light; indeed sends the light into our world and yet we see little evidence of it. We are too busy concentrating on the things that upset us.

An example of someone who was overcome by the darkness that he observed was Edward R. Murrow. It's hard to imagine a newscaster being at a loss for words, but such was the case with the famed radio and television journalist, after touring a Nazi death camp in the closing days of World War II.

At the conclusion of his broadcast, he spoke very personally to his audience: "*I pray you believe what I have said about [this camp]. I have reported what I saw and heard, but only part of it. For most of it I have no words.*"

Nor do we, as we consider the heart-rending suffering that goes on in this world. Or just maybe we are overwhelmed by our own suffering. It's just possible that God -- seeing what we humans have done to fellow humans -- has no words for it either. I find myself imagining God with tears in His eyes. In those circumstances we ourselves can only cry out, "*Where is the light?*" and pray to see something good, something of God. God sent light to the world, but some are not carrying it!

If we listen with patience and hope, if we remember deeply and honestly, then I think we come to recognize, beyond all doubt, that, however faintly we may hear God,

He is indeed speaking to us, and that, however little we may understand it; His word to each of us is both revealing and precious beyond telling.

When our minds are free from darkness and our hearts are open we can see what the light reveals. Just as when we witness the colors of the atmosphere that slowly reveal themselves as sunset arrives. We can begin to understand how subtle God is in revealing the beauty and majesty of His working in our lives.

When we open our hearts and minds to God's first words in Genesis, faith may be all we have to receive the light He sends us. God sends us the light that illuminates and leads us on right paths -- not from some distant galaxy but near by. It may seem that the light traveling to us comes very slowly. Like the long journey of the Magi, our journey may be through danger and pitfalls and as the Bible says, a road less travelled. Then as if from behind a dark cloud, the rays of light punch through restoring the smile that faded from our faces. Keep walking in the light; face the light, and the darkness will be at your back. Concentrate on godly things, and the darkness will be just a memory in the background. But be patient, because good things are worth waiting for.

In 1984, documentary filmmaker Philip Gröning pitched an idea to the cloistered Carthusian monks of the Grand Chartreuse Monastery, high in the French Alps. He proposed that he live among them, filming the day-to-day details of their lives. Having heard nothing back, he set the idea aside and went on to other projects.

Then, 16 years later, the monks answered Gröning's inquiry. Their answer was yes. And so it came to pass that, for four and a half months starting in March, 2002, he moved into the Grand Chartreuse and started filming the 2005 documentary that ensued, *Into Great Silence*.

Sixteen years may seem like a long time to wait to receive an answer, but in the context of eternity it is but a blink of the eye. God's words "*Let there be Light*," spoken into eternity is a message that is still reverberating.

It is the perfect message for this parish to give to our community. "*Let US be the light*" and encourage and give the hope needed to some visitor or family member that is looking for a faith community. "*Let there be light*" is what God sends to this planet trusting that the light of the world will transform it when His people share the light. May we not hide that light under a bushel or in our hearts. "*Let out the light*" in ways seen and heard by those living in darkness. Shine your light on them, so that their darkness will be behind them like a shadow of what it once was. And those we touch will know where to turn when they see your light and mine. Amen.