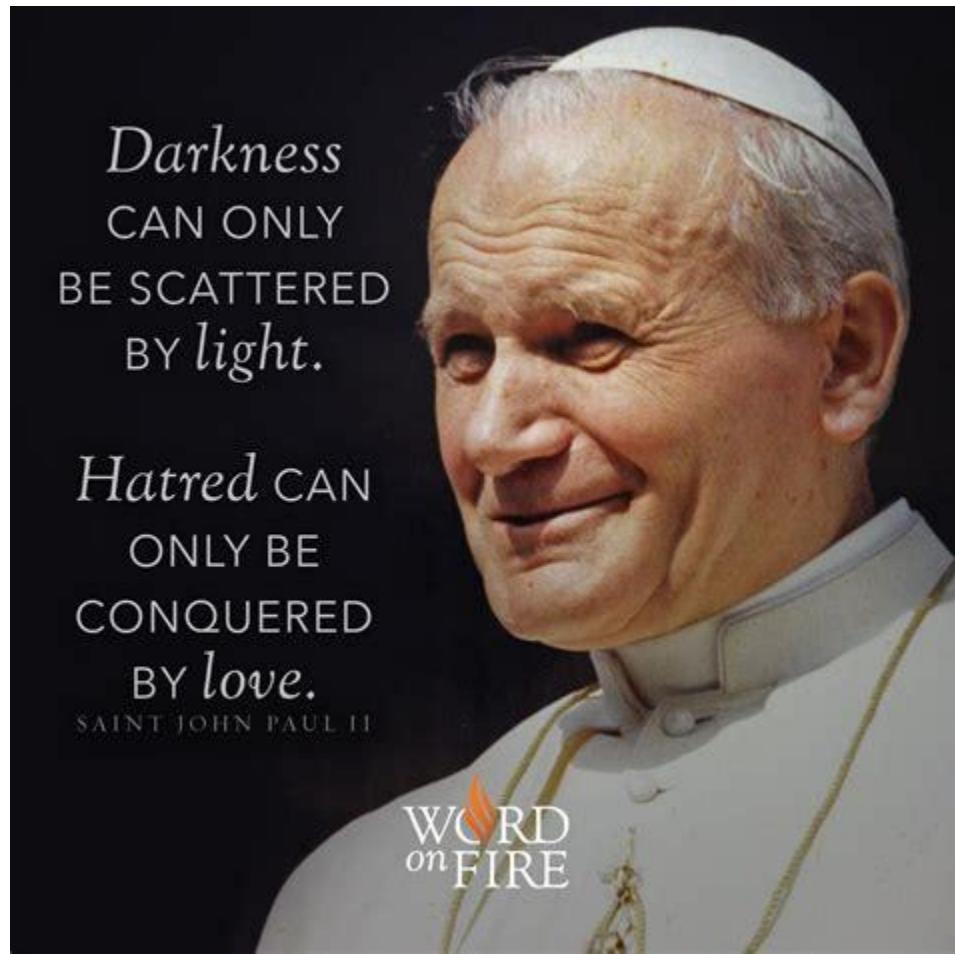


**FROM FATHER JOHN:** “I raise my eyes toward the mountains. From whence shall come my help? My help comes from the LORD, the maker of heaven and earth. He will not allow your foot to slip; or your guardian to sleep. Behold, the guardian of Israel never slumbers nor sleeps. The LORD is your guardian; the LORD is your shade at your right hand. By day the sun will not strike you, nor the moon by night. The LORD will guard you from all evil; he will guard your soul. The LORD will guard your coming and going both now and forever.” (Psalm 121:1 – 8)



Back in 1985 I toured an active coal mine in Southern Illinois. I may have told you this story before but I think it's particularly relevant during the Advent season.

Touring a coal mine resonated with me because one of my great-grandfathers and a number of my great-uncles worked in the coal mines in northeastern Pennsylvania. Not only was it interesting to see how coal mines were dug, supported against collapse and how the coal was actually mined, I got to see what my ancestors faced everyday working in the mines. The tour gave me great insight into what my ancestors did to earn a living to support our family.

At one point in our tour, we were in cavern hundreds of feet below the surface. We were all sitting in these small rail cars that transported people through the mines. The tour guide stopped the cars and had each of us turn off the light that was on our hard hats. He then turned off all the lights in the cavern. It was absolutely pitch dark. I never knew what the dark really was until that moment. I put my hand in front of my face. It was one inch from my eyes and I could not see my hand at all. If it wasn't my hand, I wouldn't have known it was there. I cannot possibly describe what that dark was like. I could not imagine how coal miners dealt with emergencies in this kind of darkness; a darkness that was debilitating, a darkness that was downright scary.

It was amazing when the tour guide turned the lights back on. All of a sudden, we could see. All of a sudden, the anxiety, the nervousness, the fear of the dark was gone. We all began to laugh in relief.

Our Lord Jesus says to us in John's gospel, "I came into the world as light, so that everyone who believes in me might not remain in darkness." (John 12:46) In (John 8:12), He goes on to say to us, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." Our Lord Jesus is the light that has come into the world so that sin, death and darkness will never prevail. Advent and Christmas are about salvation and the fact that our Lord Jesus Christ comes into the world to give us the Light of Life.

If we really stop and think about it, light is an amazing thing. We never actually see light, rays of light are not visible to the naked eye, but the light makes everything else visible to the naked eye. The Light of Christ is even more amazing because it leads us out of sin and death and darkness. It leads us out of the dungeons we create for ourselves when we fall into sin. The word 'divinity' comes from the Sanskrit root that means 'to shine'.

The Light of Christ is our birthright as the adopted sons and daughters of God the Father. The Divine Son of God came into the world to shine His light upon us, to illuminate the way of life that leads to the heavenly kingdom, to dispel the darkness of a fallen world. This is His gift to us during this Advent season and it's the gift He gives us every day of our lives.

May God Bless you and all those who love the Lord.