

The Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 21, 2017

Many scholars believe the First Letter of Peter was originally a baptismal homily, later changed into letter format for wider circulation. The letter is primarily interested in instructing the newly baptized about the implications of the life-changing step they've just taken and the responsibilities they have freely accepted by becoming members of the Body of Christ.

Now St. Peter presumes that this new faith that now guides their lives and actions will not go unchallenged by people around them. That's why he wrote: "Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope."

Yet the manner in which the explanation is given is just as important as the explanation itself. "Do it with gentleness and reverence, keeping your conscience clear."

These new Christians, like anyone who has been in love will tell you he or she can't help but to share the joy, or struggles, with others.

If someone is filled with joy and hope, everyone is going to notice and ask about it. The philosopher Aristotle said: "As a thing appears and acts, so it is." Our very essence is revealed in what we say and do, the way we carry our bodies, the way we dress and express our feelings.

If we're angry or depressed, in doubt or confusion, this will be obvious in our appearance and body language. But if we're overflowing with Easter joy, the world will notice and want to share what we have to offer.

But there are times when we have the feeling that we're not that type of Christian because we feel more like a spiritual orphan.

See if any of these sounds familiar: I feel listless in my prayer life; even though I rarely miss a Sunday it's a struggle to go to Mass; although I was close to him once I now feel that God is far away;

I try to pray regularly but nowadays I experience too many distractions or am too busy; I am often envious of other Catholics who seem to find faith easy; I feel sad and anxious that I may be falling away from the faith I once loved so much.

If so you're not alone. There's a name for this experience: it's called the dark night of the soul. And it may be surprising to learn that it may imply that those who experience the Dark Night are in some way advanced on their personal spiritual journey.

St Teresa of Avila, the great mystical teacher is often quoted for saying to God, "No wonder you have so few friends when you treat them so badly." This is often what God appears to do. It's as if he has gotten us off to a good start in childhood, either spiritually or chronologically, and then when we reach a certain maturity he abandons us.

It's said that St Therese of Lisieux experienced not one glimmer of light from God once she entered the Carmelite Community. She often prayed for a sign of God's presence but received absolutely nothing.

And yet we consider her to be one of the really great saints. Why? Because despite her lack of any evidence of God's love, she continued to pray constantly and to

turn everything she thought and everything she did into prayer.

Because of that she's regarded as having reached the very heights of the spiritual life. In our own lives as Christians we also face challenges, persecutions and transitions. Some may be as simple as dealing with a difficult co-worker or cranky child, but others (the death of a spouse, mental illness, addiction) may demand more than we think we can deal with. In all that we encounter, we can hold on to Jesus' promise, "I will not leave you orphans."

We know that we have an advocate, the Holy Spirit, who remains with us like an attentive parent who holds us close as we embrace becoming ever closer to Jesus as authentic missionary disciples, always ready to give an explanation for our hope through words and actions, so that we may more effectively and courageously proclaim Christ to a world desperately in need of His mercy and love.