

LIGHT

Several weeks ago, an electrical power substation blew up, casting all of Hollidaysburg into total darkness. This included the Bishop's Residence. It was evening and too early to go to bed. Besides, it would have been difficult to find my way upstairs, let alone my bed.

There was a scurry for candles. I remembered that I had one of my parent's kerosene lamps in the next room. Guided by candle light, I retrieved and lit it. And, so, the evening continued by lamp light.

For those of you that are too young to remember, this was the only source of light in a household some years ago. Ours was a table lamp, made of all clear glass. There was a base, a stem, and a bowl that held the fuel, - kerosene. On this sat the burner with a wick, topped by a glass chimney.

I remember when our family lived in a house without electricity. There was a lamp in the living room, which also served as the kitchen and dining room. The bedroom had its own lamp. This one stayed lit on low all night. (If one had to get up at night, you did not want to be groping for a match in the dark.) To this day, I cannot sleep in total darkness.

My father was the lamp keeper. It was his responsibility to trim the wick so that it would burn evenly and to clean the chimneys every morning. For this latter, he used human breath and newspaper.

I was reminded of all this that evening several weeks ago. There we sat at the kitchen dinette table of the Bishop's Residence by the light of a kerosene lamp, with the rest of the house in total darkness. The light did not illuminate very far beyond its own proximity. The flame was uneven and the chimney was hazy. It was obvious that, with my father gone, the lamp had not been attended to.

Subsequently, I have pondered that scene. It reflected so very well our spiritual journey, where we grope in the darkness searching for meaning. Christians can and do claim Christ as their light. He not only gives meaning to our existence but gives hope that there is something beyond what we can see at any given time. Regretfully, our wicks are often untrimmed and our chimneys are rather hazy. And, so, the light does not shine in us as brightly as it could.

As in the case of the lamp, our wicks need trimming from time to time. There needs to be an evenness, - a balance to our lives. The spiritual and the material need to work together and not against each other. Even our chimneys need to be polished from time to time. That might very well refer to the way that we witness. In other words, does the light of our faith radiate out brightly, or is it obstructed to some degree by our behavior? Good polishers can be days of reflection, retreats, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and the like. However, even a well-maintained lamp leaves much of its surroundings in a haze, if not total darkness.

I experienced great joy when all of the lights came on. All of a sudden, everything could be seen as is. That must be pretty much the way it will be when we enter into eternal glory, - everything will become clear and visible. Meanwhile, earthly life is all about keeping our lamps in good condition, - the wicks trimmed and the chimneys clean. Even limited understanding of the Lord's creation is precious to a faithful Christian.