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Lent is here to draw us back to God

In living Christian faith, much is brimming over with light. We catch a glimpse of God working wonders in our lives. We feel the power of the angel's words: "Rejoice! The Lord is with you." But in our lives, there is also much that is darkness.

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We face this whenever we need to be sorry for our sins. The forty days of Lent are such a time. We are reminded of the guilt, the shame and

the loneliness that come from turning our back on God. We know we need to do penance because we can no longer claim that our lives are filled with the Spirit. We have, as it were, chased God away. This, I think, is why Jesus said: “The bridegroom’s attendants cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is still with them. But the time will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.”

With the words about “being taken away”, our Lord was referring to the way we would rebel against our Creator and demand the crucifixion of his only-begotten Son. One of the saints described our role in this rebellion: “It is painful to read in the Holy Gospels that question from Pilate: ‘Which do you want me to release to you, Barabbas or Jesus, who is called Christ?’ It is even harder to hear the reply: ‘Barabbas!’ And it is more frightening still to

realise that—very often!—by going astray, I too have said ‘Barabbas!’, and I’ve added ‘Christ?... Crucify him!’”

We are called to rejoice in God’s grace. We are called to mourn for our lack of fidelity. Can these two attitudes exist in one person? We can understand why Jesus would say: “Blessed are those who mourn.” We are all sinners. We are all weak. Isn’t it strange, then, that Jesus also insists: “Rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven”?

This is the paradox of faith. There’s light, because it comes from God. There’s darkness, because it comes from inside ourselves. The Good News is that God will overcome the darkness with his light as long as we humble ourselves before him.

“Make yourselves clean,” God tells us through the Prophet Isaiah. “Take your wrong-doing out of my sight.

Cease doing evil. Learn to do good, search for justice, discipline the violent, be just to the orphan, plead for the widow. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. If you are willing to obey, you shall eat the good things of the earth. But if you refuse and rebel, the sword shall eat you instead.”

This article by Fr. Joe Babendreier first appeared in the Sunday Nation on 2nd March 2014.

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