

- Since the very first day of creation so long ago, there has been a tension between light and darkness in our world, as they constantly battle for dominion one over the other.
- We see this played out, of course, in nature with the changing of the seasons and the lengthening and shortening of daylight hours each and every day.
- But more importantly, we see this tension, this battle, between light and darkness taking place within the souls of each of every one of us as we fight the battle against sin.
- This battle, this tension between light and dark, is especially pronounced in this season of Advent, the season in which we wait with longing expectation for the coming of the Light of the World, all the while the nights are at their longest and exercise their greatest dominion over the daylight.
- Indeed, the Season of Advent is like the very early morning hours just before the dawn, when light is just beginning to break over the horizon before the sun makes its grand appearance.
- Just as the pre-dawn hours of the day are adorned with glorious stars, this season is adorned by glorious, light-filled feasts such as the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and even yesterday's Feast of St. Lucy (whose very name means "light"), feasts that remind us of God's power over evil and how he uses His saints to subdue the darkness of the devil.
- While there is a penitential nature to Advent, our penance is punctuated repeatedly by these hopeful notes of the liturgy that enliven our hope and bring us joy.
- Yet for all the joy of this season, let us beware that the battle remains, and that in this war between light and dark, good and evil, the real battlefield is the souls of men.
- For each of us must determine over and over again to whom we will give dominion over our souls, and consequently our salvation.
- Will we be one of our Lord's saints in Heaven, or shall we allow ourselves to be seduced by the cunning serpent who tries to captivate us with the glitzy mammon of this passing world, ever so slowly hardening our hearts to our Creator?
- As we gather on this chilly and dark morning, in the still silent hours before the world becomes fully awake, the lighted candle we bear in our hands is a sign of our hope for the coming of Light of the World, Who can deliver us from darkness.
- It's a sign of our desire not only to greet Him when He comes, but of our hope to live with Him eternally in the noontime sun of Heaven. Yet our hope for such a lofty gift as salvation must not, cannot, be borne with a feckless faith.
- No, my brothers and sisters, if we truly desire for the Light of the World to take dominion over our souls and banish the darkness that is within them, we must be confident in God and willing to fight and suffer the wounds such warfare invariably brings.
- This is a battle we fight not with our own strength, but by recourse to prayer, the Sacraments, fasting and penance. And it's a battle that will press upon us as long as we have breath.
- Yet know this: we are not alone in the battle! For our Lady is at our side!
- In this dimly lit setting, as we priests and faithful together prepare to honor the Light of the World, Who is soon to be born, we also offer praise to God for the gift of Our Lady, whose *fiat* in Nazareth secured our redemption and dealt the devil a fatal blow.

- While we know her to be meek and humble of heart like her Son, it is by that meekness and humility that Mary is both the fairest honor of our race and more awesome than an army in battle array!
- And if we but turn to her as a child in need of his mother, she turns to us with her love and protection, procuring unseen graces that sustain us and keep us in union with her Son.
- It is she who fans the flame of faith alive in our hearts. It is she who strengthens the strands of hope within us. It is she who teaches us how to love with abandon.
- It's for this reason that we honor our Lady, through whom the Light of the World chose to enter this dark world, with the sure and certain hope, that this Light whose coming we will celebrate in just 10 days will redeem us from the darkness of sin.
- As we sit in the darkness of this morning, as we endure the darkness of our world, let us remember the words of St. John of the Cross, that: "In the dark night of the soul, bright flows the river of God."
- In other words, in the pursuit of our Lord that leads to the soul's purification, the Light of the World, the Lord Himself, is ever present and available to us.
- In imitation of our Lady, whose virtues shine like the stars in the heavens, may we hold fast to this Light, trusting that by His grace, the darkness will not overcome us.