Advent 1 A

MDP of God

Friday night I had the privilege to go and do the invocation for the lighting of Bethlehem Hills—which doubles as Berkshire Country Club the rest of the year

 It’s really an incredibly beautiful display

And it kind of brings to life the teaching of our scripture readings today—especially our 1st and 2nd reading

In our first reading today –the last line was “let us walk **in the light** of the Lord”

Jesus is of course “the light of the world”—so that reding very much points to His coming

Earlier it said, “*All nations shall stream toward it; many peoples shall come and say: "Come, let us climb the LORD's mountain, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may instruct us in his ways, and we may walk in his paths." For from Zion shall go forth instruction,
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem*.”

In our 2nd reading it said, “…*it is the hour now for you to awake from sleep….. the night is advanced,* ***the day*** *is at hand. Let us then throw off the works of darkness and put on* ***the armor of light****;”*

That theme of night and day—darkness and light is very much a part of God’s message to us today

And that’s so appropriate because today we start a new church year—and I think as we begin this year it’s a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the light of Christ in our personal lives

Have we thrown off the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of Christ’s light?

Do we have the kind of enthusiasm for our Savior that Isaiah conveys in that 1st reading?

My friends—let’s for a moment contemplate the enthusiasm of Isaiah—He says*—“All nations shall stream toward it; many peoples shall come and say: "Come, let us climb the LORD's mountain… that he may instruct us in his ways, and we may walk in his paths."*

The words of Isaiah convey the idea *of people coming with great joy to the house of the Lord*— as people seeing the instruction of the Lord as an incredible gift

Do we come—*let me make this more personal*—**do you come** to the house of the Lord filled with joy—or do come out of duty because God commands you to come?—*So you gotta come*

Do you see the instructions of the Lord that comes to us in the bible and through the Church as an incredible gift---as leading you from darkness into light---or do you see God’s instructions as intrusive—as a burden—as something you have to follow to get to heaven—*but that really would prefer not to follow?*

My friends—those are important questions—because they get to the heart of your relationship with Jesus

Too often it happens—that we Catholics treat salvation as a mechanical process---1) believe in God—2) receive the sacraments—3) follow these commandments and 4) you’ll get to heaven

**And none of that is wrong**---*but it falls so short of what God desires for us*

God doesn’t want us to see salvation as a mechanical process—He wants us to see our salvation has hinging on a strong relationship with Jesus and His Family

*He wants us to love Him*—He wants us to trust Him—He wants us to desire to please Him, because we love Him

Let me just give you a little analogy—this comes from Scott Hahn:

He tells the story of when he was in high school he was involved in some pretty serious criminal behavior (obviously before he came to Christ)---but he lied to the police—**and they bought**—his mom bought the lie---*but his dad was really skeptical*

He and a friend had stolen a lot of things from a store---he made up this story that bigger older kids forced him to do it—and if he didn’t do it they were going to beat him up—so he stole these things out of fear---*he was the innocent victim*-- **It was all lie**—he stole things because he was greedy and didn’t care at the time that it was wrong—in fact he hadn’t given it much thought

So part of the lie was that he had to leave the stuff in the woods by a stump

So his dad said, “show me where you left this stuff”

So they go to the park and he start walking down this path---and he said, “It’s a woods so I figured there’d be no problem finding a stump”

Well they start walking down the path—and Scott said he’s looking on both sides of the path looking for a stump –so his dad says, “what side of the path is it on?—So he had to pick a side—“Oh, this side dad”

 His dad says—how far down is it?—And he says, not that far

So there walking *and Scott is desperately looking for a stump*---**and he’s not seeing one**

So he said they were coming to a bend in the path—and he knew that after that bend the woods ends and it opens up and there would be the mall where he did all this stealing

So just as he gets to the bend he sees this clump of leaves and dirt---and he points and says, “There—that’s where I had to leave the stuff”

 And his dad says, “You said a stump—that’s not a stump!”

 And Scott said, “*Clump—stump—what’s the difference*?”

He knew he was busted—he knew his dad knew he was lying—He said he was ready for his dad to yell and scream—he was ready for his dad to ground him

Those kinds of things happened before and that wouldn’t have bothered him

But his dad didn’t scream—he didn’t ground him—he didn’t spell out a big punishment---*his dad with a very sad expression shook his head—hung his head down in great disappointment and started walking back to the car*

 He says—that stunned him

He said, “I let my dad down. *My dad was disappointed in me*. My dad was ashamed of me”—He said—**it was devastating**

*It was devastating because he loved his dad*—**he didn’t want to let his dad down**—he didn’t want his dad to be ashamed of him—he didn’t want to disappoint his dad---*that changed his life*

And my friends—that’s what God wants

God doesn’t want us to see sin as wrong because we’ll be punished for it---He wants us to stay away from sin because we love Him and don’t want to disappoint Him

You see—sin is not just breaking a rule—it’s breaking a relationship

He wants us to stay away from sin because we love Him and want to please Him

He wants us to obey because we know He loves us and wants what is best for us—so we obey because we love Him and trust Him

He wants us to trust His Wisdom—*a lot of times we don’t fully understand why His ways are best*---but because we trust Him we’ll do it His way rather than our way or by the ways of the world--==== *because we know that He knows better than we do--- and that His ways will ultimately be best for us*

My friends—when we have that kind of a relationship with Him—we will stream to the house of the Lord with joy

Then we’ll see His instructions to us as an incredible gift rather than burdensome commands that we have to follow or we’ll be punished

God doesn’t want us to mechanically go through the motions of faith so we can get to heaven (as important as that is)

*But He wants so much more for us—He wants us to come out of the darkness into His light*

He wants us to have a deep personal relationship with Him and His Family—so that the most important thing in our lives—*is that we desire to please Him*—**we desire to make Him proud of us**—we desire to truly give Him glory—we desire to allow His light to shine through us

As we begin this new Church year—let’s seek this year *not just mechanical obedience*—but let’s seek above all else a deep relationship of love with the one who created us—with the one who humbled Himself to become one of us—with the One who died on the cross so we can be with Him forever in the glory of the heavenly home

Let’s put the deeds of darkness behind us not because we have too—but because we want to in order to please the Lord of light that we love—Amen?--Amen