

21st Sunday, Cycle A, August 27, 2017

Last Monday, at midday, the sun was blotted out, the day turned dark and looked like night. For some, it may have seemed like the end of the world. But the eclipse only lasted for a brief moment. And then, all went back to normal.

We project the image of America as a land where all people receive respect, where all are equal. We want our country to shine as a beacon of hope for the entire world, as bright as the midday sun.

And then, an ugly incident pops up, like the white supremacist demonstration at Charlottesville, where a young woman was killed and others injured. Forces of violence and hatred tarnish that positive image of America. Racism and prejudice prevent our light from shining, just as surely as an eclipse blocks the light of the sun.

Jesus tells us that we should let our light shine before others, so that they can give glory to God. Those dark deeds cast a shadow and keep the light from shining bright.

In today's gospel reading, Peter stands out from all the others because of his faith in Jesus Christ. He arrives at that faith, not through his own efforts, but through a special grace granted to him by Almighty God. As Jesus tells him, "For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father."

Peter's faith shines bright. That is why Jesus makes Peter the foundation of his church, the foundation of our faith. It is something that we arrive at, not through our own efforts, but by God's grace. If we stay there, we will stand on solid ground. "And the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it."

Last Monday, I travelled up to Leavenworth, to witness the eclipse, since Leavenworth lay in the path of totality. But it was an overcast day. Clouds covered the sky, not to mention the sun, all day long. The eclipse was not necessary to blot out the sun. The clouds had already done it.

In today's gospel reading, Peter's faith shines bright. But next Sunday, as the gospel reading continues, we will hear how sin can blur that faith and cast a shadow on it. Jesus will rebuke Peter and call him Satan.

That is what sin can do to our faith. It may not be a total eclipse, but it may cast a shadow, so that the clouds hide the sun, and our light does not shine. Racial prejudice and ethnic slurs bring darkness to our world. We do not need to go to the extremes of white supremacists, the Ku Klux Klan and neo-Nazis, to blur the light. Our own sins can do that. Whenever we put down others because of their national origins or religious beliefs, we are covering up the light. The day is clouded over.

That is why Jesus tells us: "You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father."