

After the Heart of Jesus ...

*“Brothers and sisters:
You were once darkness,
but now you are light in the Lord.
Live as children of light,
for light produces every kind of goodness
and righteousness and truth.
Try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.*

*‘Awake, O sleeper,
and arise from the dead,
and Christ will give you light.’”*

TIME Magazine just released an article entitled *America's Unfaithful Faithful* that considers the reality of adults leaving the churches of their upbringing. The article shares insights from research done by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life on data from 35,000 persons called the U.S. Religious Landscape Survey. Some of the main points include the big message is “Blink and they’ll change. There is a constant membership turnover among most American faiths. America’s religious culture, which is best known for its high participation rates, may now be equally famous (or infamous) for what the new report dubs *churn*.” According to Pew, 28% of American adults have left the faith of their childhood for another one. That does not even include those who switched from one Protestant denomination to another; if it did, the number would jump to 44%. According to the Pew Forum director, “Americans not only change jobs, change where they live, and change spouses, but they change religions too.” Analyzing this data is fascinating. There is no one particular factor that contributes to these changes, but rather a set of cultural influences that promote *change* as a way of life.

If the people who have stopped practicing their faith were here today to tell us why they gave up, many of them would probably say that Christianity was an additional burden in their life that they really didn’t need. They might tell us how busy they are and that they don’t have time for the additional observances and obligations of religion. They might say something like, “I work five, or six, or even seven days a week. I’m so busy, I’m too tired, I just don’t have time for God.”

But people of true faith know that Christianity is not an additional burden of observances and obligations added to our life. Rather, Christianity bestows significance, and beauty, and new light on what we are already doing. Christ illumines our existing world, and faith in Christ enables us to see that world as it truly is. One of the ways Christ saves us is by revealing who God is and who we are meant to be. Jesus shows us God as forgiving, loving and faithful, welcoming the sinner and the lost. True sight is really insight into who Jesus is and how his vision changes how we are to look at the world.

Jesus says, “I am the light of the world.” And when he said that, he was claiming no special power to create or to radically change the world; instead Jesus makes it possible for eyes encased in darkness to see once again what was already in existence -- the beauty and love of God’s creation. What cures the blind man in today’s gospel is not simply the power to distinguish tables and chairs or to see people and the landscape. Rather, the blind man really sees when he confesses Jesus as the Messiah and the center of all human existence. And now, because the blind man can truly see with the light of Jesus, he can perceive an entirely new hope and purpose in life.

The tragedy of those who have given up on the practices of the faith because they feel that faith has become an extra burden in their already busy lives is this: they seem to be saying, “I’m too busy groping in the darkness to let the light come in.” Jesus doesn’t add extra burdens to life. He is the light which enters our life, so that we no longer have to grope. Jesus doesn’t take us away from this world; rather he brings us back to the real world in its freshness, in its goodness, and in its wholesomeness. Light not only enables us to see, but the pure light of Jesus makes sure that we see the world and people as they really are.

During this Lent we fast and give alms -- we pray and wait -- so that our hearts may be open to Jesus who will purify our eyes and straighten out our values -- so that we may see truly with the strong light of Jesus. How difficult it is for us to see without light! And how much more difficult it is for us to see truly without the light of Jesus!

May Jesus be our light!

After the Heart of Jesus,
Father John

