

FIRST LIGHT Reveal the Spirit

In a classical rabbinic story, the teacher asks the disciples: "When do you know it is dawn?" One says, "when you can distinguish a white thread from a black one." "No," says the teacher. "When you can see the outline of a tree against the horizon," ventures another. "No," says the teacher — to this and all other efforts to answer the question. Finally, he says, "when you can look into the eyes of an 'other', a stranger, and see a brother or a sister, then it is dawn. Until then, it is still night."

The theme FIRST LIGHT invites us to recognise the world as the place in which we discover God. God's Spirit is in Creation. The first words of God were "Let there be light" (Gen 1:3), and with that our world dawned into existence. We can recognise and experience God's Spirit through the beauty and goodness of everything that the world holds and reveals, the spring buds on a tree, the warmth of the sun on your face, the sharing of a meal at a soup kitchen on a winter's day, in the eyes of a stranger. *Everything* reveals the presence of God (1 Cor 10:26).

At times God's Spirit can appear in dramatic bursts of light – through the brilliance of an electric sunrise that makes you fall momentarily still – when you recognise that the earth is indeed 'charged' with the glory of God!¹ Often though, it may appear without much fanfare; a small act of kindness, an unexpected word of affirmation from a classmate, a healing gesture of forgiveness. For the prophet Elijah, God's Spirit was experienced in the hush of a gentle breeze (1 Kings 19:12).

Sometimes it may be revealed in the darkest night when the weight of the world feels heaviest. Even the smallest light within us can shine brightest in the darkest times (2 Cor 4:6). We find further encouragement in the words of St Paul who reminds us that "everything brought into the light becomes light!". Everything can be *transformed* into light.

This light is the dwelling of the Holy Spirit within each one of us, and if we can recognise the goodness and beauty within, it helps us to see it in others. It is said that we don't see things as they are, but we see things as we are. Eckhart Tolle wrote: "You do not become good by trying to be good, but by finding the goodness already within you, and allowing that goodness to emerge." Through an awareness of the goodness within ourselves – God's Spirit breathing through us, - we too are transformed, and we become a gift of God's light for the world. We are changed, and the world is changed by us.

Saint Marcellin Champagnat believed that God's Spirit was always present and at work in the world, inspiring his mission and giving strength to his purpose. It is this gift of the Spirit that we as Marists want to share with others, the young, our colleagues, the stranger – of bringing people into the joy and freedom of the light of Christ – the Source of all Light:

"I am the Light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the Light of life." (Jn 8:12)

We pray that the Holy Spirit illuminates our minds and hearts to recognise and know God's presence in the breath-taking and ordinary encounters of our life. We pray that our lives will be transformed by God's Spirit, making known the presence of God in the world and within us:

"You are the light of the world... let your light shine." (Mt 5:14-16)

When do you know that it is dawn?
How is God's Spirit being revealed to you?

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¹ God's Grandeur, Gerard Manley Hopkins



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Matthew 5:14-16

Image Reflection

God is revealed uniquely to each of us, just as the light falls on each rock in this 80-metre chasm, so too the Holy Spirit illuminates and reveals God's presence to us – in the world and in each one of us.

The light and passageway of Standley Chasm draws you in, like a natural cathedral, but also invites you to look around the corner and explore further. The photographer, Nick Psomiadis describes the scene... the sheer cliffs glowing in sunlight, a spectacular scene to behold as the sun passes over the chasm.

It took Nick three days to achieve this photo because the chasm only receives light directly at a particular moment. You can notice the presence of light as the narrow vista changes colour at dawn, but the full strength of the sun is only at an appointed time of the day.

The notion of visibility and invisibility is central to Aboriginal thinking and rays of light that rouse the spirit is central to their spirituality. Standley Chasm is known traditionally as Angkerle Atwatye, meaning 'Gap of Water' and is a place of deep cultural significance to Western Arrernte people as a sacred site of women's dreaming and birthing.

The chasm was later named after Ida Standley, the first school teacher in the West MacDonnell Ranges. For fifteen years, Ida Standley was the only government teacher in Central Australia and helped to give Aboriginal children a basic education. Ida was highly respected and described by the press as the 'beloved lady'.