

When I was a child back in the late 1960s there was a popular afternoon television show called Dark Shadows. This was in some ways just another soap opera. But Dark Shadows had a special twist: one of the main characters, named Barnabas Collins, was – a vampire. I’m not kidding, and it wasn’t played for laughs. Dark Shadows had all of us kids wonderfully terrified. My mom wouldn’t let us watch it; afraid we would have nightmares. But we snuck over to the house of friends with less discriminating parents and watched the scary secrets of Barnabas Collins and his victims.

Kids, listen to your parents when they limit your media use. I should have obeyed my mom, because early one morning, before first light, I woke up in my dark bedroom with a strange feeling. I’d heard something. I looked around with my heart beating faster. And then I saw . . . HIM. There standing beside the bedpost of my brothers’ bunkbed was – Barnabas Collins! A tall shape with a flowing cape that almost reached the floor. I couldn’t breathe. Did he see me? Slowly, very slowly, I slid under the covers. Monsters can’t get through the covers. With heart beating wildly, I listened

and waited. I slid an eye out to check. Barnabas was still there motionless. Why didn't he move? Finally, after I don't know how many minutes I just had to look again. Still there.

But wait! The first light of dawn was just coming in the window. And in a flash of recognition and a transformation of sight I realized I was saved! It wasn't Barnabas Collins at all! The evil monster was just my brothers' long coats hanging by their hoods, one over another, from nails in the post of the bunkbed. And once I recognized the truth I wondered how I could have made that mistake.

Our faith in Christ is often portrayed in scripture as a coming to see in a new way. We were blind, but now we see. As in my boyhood run-in with Barnabas Collins, think of the transforming power of faith as being like the power of light in the darkness.

In our gospel story the man who has been given the gift of sight by Christ behaves in a new way, because he sees in a new way. This poor beggar stands up to the Pharisees. He defends Christ whom a short time before he didn't even know. He alienates

his frightened parents. He's thrown out of the synagogue. These losses would seem to be a high price to pay -- but only in the world's eyes. By accepting this rejection, pain, sacrifice – this man now is ready for an even deeper encounter with Christ. When Jesus finds him and asks, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” He can now see Jesus as the Messiah. He can say, “I do believe, Lord,” and worships Him. From hopeless darkness he gradually grows into the light of faith and can confess, not just physically, but more important, spiritually, “I was blind and now I can see.”

“I am the light of the world,” Jesus says in the gospel. I've been asked, “You don't believe everything the Church teaches, do you?” as if that is impossible, or at least ridiculous. I haven't always. There was a time I saw Catholic dogmas and doctrine as absurd, evil -- limiting my freedom rather than guiding me home to safety. But, yes, I now believe everything the Church teaches. Not because I suspended my reason or violated it. But because as Christ our light came to dwell more fully in me, the light of my faith illuminated my reason, and I saw things in a new way.

Without that faith we live in darkness or half-light, seeing vampires and other evils where there are none, while at the same time, we're blind to, and so stumble over, real dangers. Why do people leave the Catholic faith? I suspect, because first, they did not have a personal relationship with Jesus; and second, they didn't realize that the best place to live that relationship out to the fullest was in the Catholic Church. Their faith – their spiritual sight - was still partial.

In every faith journey there comes a moment when things shift. The light goes on. The teachings of Christ's Church that once seemed painful, too difficult, or pointless suddenly take on a new value. What once motivated all my life's striving and energy is seen to be worthless -- or worse. And what once seemed impossible, even evil, now appears good. When that happens, a Catholic will not leave the Church anymore than the Man born blind in today's gospel would abandon Christ – even under duress.

If we do not yet see and cannot yet believe as Christ and His Church do, we must not throw up our hands in frustration or grow

comfortable or rebellious. Instead pray patiently and humbly for greater faith – for more light. Do not reject the teaching of the Church. Perhaps there’s just not enough light yet. Our faith needs to grow. Perhaps it is only early morning on our journey. We can only dimly make out the contours of God’s plan and meaning in our lives. Wait and watch. Look at the teachings again and again from under the covers so to speak – educate yourself. What does the Church really teach and why? And pray humbly for light.

“Awake, O Sleeper and arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light,” Paul tells us. As our faith grows and the sun rises in our hearts the difficulties we once had will disappear, not through self-delusion or mindless subservience, but because a deeper faith means a clearer light – Christ within us. And in that light the dark shadows and monsters of our nighttime will fade, and we’ll see there was nothing to be afraid of in the first place. The error, sin and fears we once were so attached to were only an illusion, dissipated by the dawn. And we will then truly be able to see and rejoice in the light of the risen Son.