Spirituality
Soul Seeing



(Unsplash/Rebecca Peterson Hall)

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In Wisconsin, the weather is drab and gray most days this time of year. We get up while it is still dark outside, and by the time we get home to have dinner, the sun, if

it appeared at all during the day, is gone.

There are some days of brilliant white snow that remind me of beauty, but even those days settle back into dark drabness full of slush and cranky drivers, often accompanied by a cold that makes it hard to breathe. We know that the days are indeed starting to get longer, though it doesn't feel as if they are when I am waiting in the dim light of the bus stop in the morning. I look up the schedule of the sunrise, only to realize we have at least another month before the light will return for this morning ritual.

As church, we celebrate moments of light in this darkness. We began back in December with lighting our Advent candles in the darkness of winter dinnertimes while waiting for the light of the candles on Christmas Eve. We follow with the celebration of Epiphany and the star that leads us through the darkness to the light. We light candles on Candlemas when Jesus is presented in the temple, and we hear those words of both longing and comfort, "Now let your servant go in peace ..."

That dreary drabness of winter, these months of S.A.D., often reflect certain seasons of our lives. As a single working mom, much of my time is spent figuring out what to cook for dinner and how to fit it in before soccer practice. As a weary Christian discouraged by the drabness of the church, that difficulty is found in getting out of my pajamas on Sunday to go worship among the living rather than curled up on my couch with a cup of coffee and a YouTube Mass.

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As writers, we often make it sound so easy to find God among the everyday, but the reality is more elusive. I always hope that the spark of faith is going to spontaneously show up — in that moment when I gaze down lovingly at my children's faces while tucking them into bed or in that moment of connection in the liturgy that makes it worth having gone out in the cold.

But, in reality, that moment often eludes me in the reality of a bedtime fight over who tripped whom on the way up the stairs or the struggle of trying to keep the kids

quiet and well behaved during a long, uninspiring sermon. Sometimes faith is spontaneous, but more often it is a discipline and a choice. We have to look for it and see it, even when we are weary, and so we light a candle in our darkness.

Finding hope is hard. And so we light a candle in prayer. We ask the light to shine in the darkness when we cannot. We ask the Holy Spirit to give words to our prayer, when we have none. We turn again to Jesus, who says, "Come, follow me."

I wish I could say that such a candle lights up the whole world, but it doesn't, and that is not what our faith promises. The promise is simpler — that when we light that candle, we will not be overcome by the darkness.

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The world of our candles is still one of shadows, where we see darkly, dimly as if in a mirror, St. Paul would say. The flame of that candle is not yet the beatific vision where we will see God face to face, but it is grace, the flickering of our hope and the promise.

The eyes of our soul see the infinite love of God in that flame, the flame that allows us to take tentative footsteps in our world of shadows.

Our small, seemingly insignificant acts of faith, our getting out of bed on Sunday to go to church or putting yet another dinner on the table and reading another bedtime story do in fact light up the world when they are not seen as singular acts but as an interconnected whole. We share our small lights with one another, and our faith as a colder discipline and choice sustains us as we wait for the return of the sun and the warmth and the spring and summer seasons of our faith.

And the spring does come. This morning, as if sensing the need for hope in the world in the bitter cold at the bus stop, the sky was a brilliant display of oranges and pinks, hinting that the sun's return is not too far away and reminding me that the most beautiful sunrises usually require a degree of cloudiness to show their colors.

So the next time life seems so overwhelming, as it often is, or even just drab and dreary, light a candle in prayer. See in that flickering light the grace of God, always present, and let that light enkindle your hope and remind you that we are held by love. Adopt this age-old tradition that tells us that there is always a light the

darkness cannot overcome.

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