

# Beggars of Light

## *Brother Superior General's 2014 Christmas Message*

*In the beginning was the Word,  
and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.  
In the Word was life, and that life was the light of all people.  
This light shines in the darkness, and darkness has not overcome it.  
(Jn 1:1.4-5).*

Light and darkness are two deeply engraved notions in human psychology, two concepts highlighting the contrast between irreconcilable realities. Where light reigns, darkness is excluded. Where there is darkness, light is banished.

On the other hand, given the importance of light for the development of ecosystems on planet Earth, light is logically associated to life, and darkness to death. For this reason, ancient peoples celebrated in various ways, especially with large bonfires, the triumph of the sun over darkness. This happened, for example, during the winter solstice, when the days begin to lengthen.

Following the same symbolism, the Church decided to celebrate the birth of Jesus in December, in proximity to the winter solstice: with the coming of Jesus, hope and light are reborn in the world. We will celebrate this with joy on December 25<sup>th</sup>: Jesus, whom we acknowledge and proclaim as Light of the World, is coming to us!

Christmas is not just the memory of an event that took place over 2000 years ago, but a celebration deeply connecting with the most profound and intimate aspirations of the human heart, which yearns for light, and longs for the fullness of life personally and for everyone on the planet. However, our daily experience is that of the coexistence of light and darkness, good and evil, even in our own hearts: *If the light in you has turned into darkness, how terrible that darkness will be!* (Mt 6:23).

*This light shines in the darkness, and darkness has not overcome it!* Against all odds, and although the daily news seem to indicate otherwise, we firmly believe that life is stronger than death, and light overcomes darkness.

This is probably what the builders of New Grange, north of Dublin, experienced. It is a huge mound of about 80 meters in diameter, dating back to the Neolithic Era, about five thousand years ago. The structure is made of approximately 280 thousand tons of pebble. The white stone covering it came from the coast, which is about 80 km away.



This archaeological site is famous, above all, because of a phenomenon recurring every year on December 21<sup>st</sup>, the winter solstice in the northern hemisphere. There is a hole on the tomb's front door, which is aligned with the rising sun precisely that day, so the sunlight goes through it and crosses the aisle all the way to the center of the burial chamber. This portent lasts only twenty minutes, during which a place that is immerse in darkness all year round becomes completely flooded with light.



For five thousand years, as the builders of New Grange intended, light has beaten the site's internal darkness on December 21<sup>st</sup>. I think this is a beautiful image to express the deep yearning for light dwelling in each of us, and the conviction that darkness has not the last word.

Discussing the Gospel text on the healing of Bartimaeus, Luigi Verdi wrote: *Bartimaeus is a beggar of light, like all of us... Sitting in a corner of the road, he is screaming, as we all do. Whatever cannot dance*

*its way out and surface to the lips and skin, he yells from the depths of his soul. We know all too well the cry dwelling within us: each of us has a whimper of pain deep in the soul, like a call waiting for someone to see our suffering and pay attention to us. The darkness in Bartimaeus begs for a caress, such as our own darkness does.*

We are beggars of light. In our deepest self, we glimpse an empty space, an unhealed wound, an insatiable thirst. Oftentimes we give in to the temptation of filling that emptiness with material possessions or intellectual knowledge; when we realize it is useless, our frustration grows deeper.

The celebration of Christmas is a wonderful opportunity to grow in the conviction that our darkness is nothing else but a deep yearning for light.

I wish you a very happy New Year 2005, as we search together for light. The path lying ahead requires abandoning the easy solutions aimed at simply killing pain, and choosing peaceful and patient silence, which can slowly drill our superficiality and lead us to our deepest self.

*By night we hasten, by night,  
under a moonless sky, we go moonless,  
for when it comes to finding the source,  
only our thirst leads us onward.*

Luis Rosales, *Retablo de Navidad*.

My best wishes for you and your loved ones, and Merry Christmas!

*Luigi Verdi*