**Dark Nights of the Soul**

**When the disciples and Jesus were in a boat surrounded by a rough sea, Jesus said to his disciples, “Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?”  I think faith grows when we understand the meaning of the words from Jesus a little bit better as we travel through our lives.  Jesus’ disciples must have matured in their faith as they journeyed with Jesus and heard his parables and teachings. Faith is something we don’t have from the time we are born. Yet just like the faith of the disciples, faith grows as we become more immersed in Jesus’ words and actions.**

**But there are occasions in our lives when we go through what Joseph Campbell described as the dark night of the soul. At certain times we can lose our faith and feel lost.  Campbell wrote about these times in this way** **“It’s always darkest before the dawn. We feel like giving up.” We’ve all reached this point at some time. These times can be our “dark night of the soul.” This is different than depression. Saint John of the Cross wrote, “If a man wishes to be sure of the road he’s traveling on, then he must close his eyes and travel in the dark. We need to somehow make peace that even though things are not what we thought they were, it’s okay. We are growing and changing.”**

**If we accept the challenges of the dark nights of our soul, we can travel out of the darkness with our faith growing and with a deeper belief in our Lord Jesus Christ.  When we emerge from a dark night of the soul, our deepening faith can help us through other dark nights that might arise for us. Joseph Campbell said it this way. “The dark night of the soul comes just before revelation. When everything is lost, and all seems darkness, then comes the new life and all that is needed.”**

**There are so many examples of those who followed Jesus’ suffering through their dark nights of the soul.  Consider the eleven disciples who survived what they thought was the death of Jesus on a cross.  How utterly devastated they must have all felt.  I have an image of St. Peter carved into my mind, as he listened to the cock crow and knew he had denied his Lord three times. Imagine his despair for three days until he knew Jesus had been raised from the dead.  St. Peter overcame his dark night of the soul and his deepening faith carried him to become recognized in the early church as the leader of the beginning Christiaan Church. St. Peter also became known as the first of the church’s unbroken succession of popes, bishops and priests.**

**Then there is St. Paul, a man who was first known as Saul, citizen of Rome, making him an elite in Roman society. According to the Book of Acts. Saul was riding along on a horse when he was struck down and made blind. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" Saul asked. “Who are you, Lord?" He then heard Jesus saying to him, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." Saul was blind for three days and after those days became the man we know as St. Paul, the person who wrote two thirds of the New Testament. As Joseph Campbell wrote, “The dark night of the soul starts to end just before revelation. When everything is lost, and all seems darkness, then comes the new life and all that is needed.”**

**None of us are saints, yet we have experienced, in many ways, the dark night of the soul. We have each been lost for a while. Wandering in a desert of despair. We might ask ourselves questions such as, what am I doing? What is happening to me? Why do I feel lost and discouraged?  What’s the purpose of all this suffering? There are many ways a dark night of the soul can encompasses us. Yet they have a theme of ending and bringing us a new day dawning full of hope.**

**I do know once we’re out of a dark night of the soul, we experience new hope. Also we often are given help to move us along what might be a completely new path. Events might occur in our life we never believed possible.  Unexpected people my enter our new path and help us along our way.  Our faith is stronger than ever before as we begin to walk on our new path. Sometimes dark nights of the soul can last as short as St. Peter’s and St, Paul’s three days, other times they can last much longer. Yet when the dark nights of the soul stop, some people are able to do extraordinary things to help the rest of humanity.**

**I’m thinking of two well-known politicians who both experienced long and difficult dark nights of the soul, but when their dark nights were over, they were able to complete their lives by caring about others.  One of these politicians was John McCain, who was a prisoner of war for five long years.  He never gave up through difficult times of torture, yet he must have wondered when he would be set free.  He was a prisoner for five years. He could never raise one of his arms again for the rest of his life.  After his long and difficult dark night of the soul, he became a dedicated and honest politician.**

**The other man I’m thinking of is John Lewis.  From an early age he fought for the equal rights of all people. When he was in his early twenties his head was cracked open by a policeman as he tried to take part in a peaceful march. Once he recovered from his injury he continued to work tirelessly for the equal rights of all people. He must have had many dark nights of his soul as he continued his quest of equality for everyone.  He also was a man a great faith who never gave up hoping for all people to be recognize as equal.  He became a United States senator and did all he could to continue his believe in equality of everyone.**

**No matter what each of us must face in our life, no matter how many dark nights of the soul we may have, we have the assurance of Jesus we will never be alone.  We have the Holy Spirit he left for us who will always help us as we struggle through any dark night of our soul. We also have the knowledge our faith will increase if we allow God to lead us through the dark nights of the soul until we reach a new path of hope and stronger faith. Amen**