

**Sr. Renae Hohensee, OSF**  
**Vigil ~ Final Profession of Vows**

August 6, 2010

*Reflection by Sr. Dorothy Schwendinger, OSF*

Reading: John 1:1-13

"Light" by Iliad Delio, OSF

**Light** is the beautiful symbol that Renae is asking us to consider both this evening and tomorrow. Light - so simple, so common, so much a part of our lives. Daily the generosity of the sun illumines our world, warms our fingers and toes, tempers our climate, greens our trees, announces the new dawn and calls us to rest with each sunset. We long for the light of the sun after a series of cloudy days, we bathe in its radiance on sunny days, we try to capture it in our artistic paintings, replicate it with our chemicals, engines, motors, windmills and batteries. At times, as we are doing tonight, we accept it as a wondrous gift and let it draw us into gratitude, beauty and prayer.

The properties of light are strange and mysterious. Its bizarre attributes, even after centuries of study, continue to confound us. Light seems to take up no space or place. It has no shape. Light seems like nothing at all or almost nothing at all. Though it illuminates everything, light itself is invisible. It is not material yet it travels in time and space - not quite like a particle and not quite like a wave. Does gravity affect light? No. Or yes or maybe - but only a little.

Light is ubiquitous. Just last month astronomers, working in Europe and in Chile uncovered a massive new baby star about to hatch. Located in the constellation of Centaurus, this star is twenty times the mass of the sun and it is 30,000 times more luminous than the sun. In July of this year, scientists also found a brilliant new star in the dramatic Carina Nebula located in the southern Milky Way. They know it is a young star that will die early because it is shedding its light many millions of times faster than our relatively sedate sun.

I mention this astrological data to remind us that there is no shortage of light in the cosmos. And just as there is no scarcity of light in our more immediate physical world, so too, there is surely no scarcity of light at work in the mysterious world of the mystical, the spiritual and the imagined.

So both scientist and people of faith are beginning to see that the world of the Enlightenment is so limited. They, we, no longer accept a world that runs like a clock God winds up and sets in motion and then more or less forgets about. No, more and more we are accepting the world described to us by the new physics. In this world creation is understood as a single ongoing event. It is organic not a machine. Everything is interconnected. Nothing acts without influencing everything else. The world is older, bigger than we once thought and the cosmos is moving and evolving in ways we have never before imagined. In this view they are seeing the good, the true and the beautiful in new light. They are seeing intelligence and wisdom, love and grace as possibilities in the grand and complex plan. There are even some among us

who believe that the best insights coming out of the scientific community seem to have been “plucked out of the universe.” That is, they seem to echo foundational paradigms, intuitive consciousness, and new theological intimations. These insights seem to arise not so much from individual capacities but indeed from the “music of the spheres,” from the interplay of inner cosmic voices, from the deep dear core of things.

The author, John Updike, in one of his books (Roger's Version) captures this shift.

***The physicists are getting things down to the nitty-gritty. They've really pared things down to the ultimate details and the last thing they ever expected to happen is happening. God is showing through...they've been scraping away at the physical reality all these centuries, and now the layer of the little that is left is so fine God's face is staring right out at us.***

Of course, in the face of what is new some will waver. Some will question. Some will hold to an old paradigm and some will call believers “fools.” In one of her poems, Mary Oliver describes this well:

***But you know how it is when something  
different crosses the threshold.  
The uncles mutter together,  
the women walk away,  
the young brother begins to sharpen his knife.***

***(Maybe)***

But she also says in another poem:

***Still, what I want in my life is to be willing to be dazzled,  
to cast aside the weight of facts,  
and maybe even to float a little above this different world.  
I want to believe that I am looking into the white fire of mystery.  
I want to believe that tho the imperfections are many,  
that the light is everything, that it is more than sun...  
And I do!***

***(Gazing at the Lilies)***

Casting aside the weight of facts? Something different crossing the threshold? Oh, yes, indeed. Religious life is a rare and daring choice. Tomorrow Renae will stand before the community, her sisters, family, friends, and the whole global community and say “forever.” She will say that she believes she has somehow plucked this intent from the universe. In the light of this new story she will promise to find, in a new way, what is good, what is true and what is beautiful.

Renae is about to take a bold and some would say, brash step. But Renae knows this response to a call is not coming alone from her own capacities. She knows there is precedent.

She knows that there was once an Italian woman called Clare. Her name, Chiara, meant "clear or luminous or light." This woman too, long ago, also plucked from the universe a similar sense of call and consciousness – a call to walk a new and daring path as a Franciscan. Renae knows that Francis of Assisi was caught up in this new story even in the 13<sup>th</sup> century... That is often what saints do. Francis sensed that the global community expected much from him. For awhile he thought it called him to be a chivalrous knight, a hero in war, the center of attention among his frisky friends. But through failure and delusion, in depression and disappointment, by letting go of his own fantasies and by immersing himself in prayer, he learned that his life was to take a new turn – a turn to Jesus. Now new footprints led to brothers and sisters, lepers, the left out and the excluded. This turn brought him very much out of his comfort zone because he knew "that everything he wanted was just outside his comfort zone." (Robert Allen.) Now footprints led to **light** that came in slow burnings, flashes of vision, ecstatic love, the experience of blindness, searing wounds and painful fire. All the way, Francis stayed open, attentive and awake. He turned toward the **light. He turned toward the poor and to the poor beloved Christ.**

As we focus with Renae on the symbol of light, we know that for her too, like Clare and Francis, and indeed for our founder, Mother Xavier, the light is sometimes dim and sputtering and the coals of the fire sometimes barely glow. Like Francis she learned that the path she once chose was very different from what is now about to be confirmed in the evangelical vows. But a new door has opened. A new light appeared. By being open, attentive and awake, Renae had the courage to explore it in the company of her sisters, who too, are in the process of seeking the light.

***She is turning toward the light. She is turning toward those who are poor and to the poor beloved Christ.***

We, her sisters, know this comes about in many sacred moments. It comes about gradually, sometimes in darkness and sometimes in light. It emerges out of joy and pain. It comes with growth and it comes with grace. I don't doubt that everyone here understands this process for we all know we must transverse the vicissitudes of life.

So, tonight, we all can carry the inscrutable but fortuitous symbol of **light**.

It is only because we rely on an abiding love that we can carry this light and not be afraid.

It is only because of faith that we can know that the "promises of the Lord are sure."

It is only because of hope that we can say, "You, Renae, will have the Lord for your everlasting light (Isaiah 60)." In the dawn, we will know the blessed kindness of a provident God.

And so we go forth into this night open, attentive, and awake. Blessed be the name of the holy one!

References:

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