NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

A moment in the dark

Rich Heffern | Apr. 12, 2010 NCR Today

My wife and I spent a weekend recently in a little house way back in the woods in the country. We were miles from town, hundreds from the nearest big city. Evening fell. There was no moon that night. In the country, a moonless night means a kind of enveloping darkness we city dwellers seldom experience any longer.

My wife went to play cards with the neighbors for the evening and took our flashlight to light the way down the woodland path. I told her I?d be along later. When it was time for me to make my way through the woods I realized she had taken the only flashlight. Searching for some other light source, I found an old kerosene lamp. With the soot-blackened chimney sheltering a flickering flame, I made my way slowly along the twisting, turning path, flanked on both sides by fragrant pines.

About halfway down the path, a night breeze came up suddenly and blew out my lamp. I stopped and stood there, thinking at that moment how much I would give for a single wooden match with which to relight my flame. But technology had I none.

I stood with the useless lamp in my hand, stumped and more than a little afraid of the darkness ? and gradually began to come alive.

As my eyes got used to the dark, I discovered that I could see, somewhat dimly, the silhouettes of the trees against the sky. Far off, I could hear the lonely cry of an owl and the barking of a distant dog; the soft meditative dripping of raindrops left over from an early evening storm. The wonderful smells of the woodland, the aroma of damp leaf mold and pine needles.

Slowly I began to feel my way along the path. My hands brushed against rough tree bark. My feet cautiously groped among gnarled roots along the path. There was the ruffle and flap of feathered wings when I startled a sleeping bird out of a cedar sapling. The clouds overhead began to part. I could see patches of stars here and there. Some of them were down among the trees, looking like fugitives from the night sky, brilliant twinklings in among the dark branches. The pine trees were mute presences. The silence had a life of its own. Mystery was all around me.

Inside of me, I felt a kind of thrill, a tingling, a delightful sense of expectation. It seemed that anything might happen, that adventures and revelations were just around the next bend in the path. I could feel the blood?s flood pounding through my veins. At the same time I was conscious of being filled with a sense of gentle love and affection for all of creation, especially its living things. I was sorry I?d disturbed the sleeping bird.

I never would have experienced the fullness, the richness, the poignancy of that ordinary moment in the woods if my flame had not been blown out by an errant wind.

I am not recommending we all go back to kerosene lamps and log houses. I?m only suggesting that there is a dynamics to simplicity and mindfulness that has a lot to do with living life to the fullest and deepest extent. The more lightly we walk on the Earth the more she gives us.

Source URL (retrieved on *02/13/2016 - 18:33*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/moment-dark