

We have been updating our century-old rectory. By simply removing a wall between my small rectory closet and an unused hallway supply closet, we created a modest walk-in closet, providing sufficient standing room as I ponder my vast wardrobe- “Which black shirt do I want to wear today?” The builders even installed an automatic light with two settings, dim and bright. The trouble is, I never know which one will come on when I cross the threshold. There is no discernible pattern- it can be quite jarring very early in the morning.

In the spiritual life, we too can struggle with imperfect knowledge about whether the path ahead will be well-lit or if dark shadows may suddenly appear on the road. It can be disconcerting until we accept that this is the way of faith. The path ahead is never set in stone. How we manage darkness and light says a lot about our trust in God’s providence. Our first reading brought home this point.

The Lord promised Isaiah to make him “a light to the nations,” a phrase familiar to any who have studied Vatican II, the title of arguably its most important document. The preparatory commission chose title simply be “On the Church,” (*De Ecclesia*) but that was changed later to *Lumen Gentium*, “Light of the Nations.”

The switch was deliberate, and the first sentence became, “Christ is the light of nations.” It continues “sacred synod ... eagerly desires ... to bring the light of Christ to all men, a light brightly visible on the countenance of the Church.” Describing the Church as “a sacrament or as a sign,” the council “desires now to unfold more fully to the faithful of the Church and to the whole world its own inner nature and universal mission.”¹

The phrase “light for the nations” links the old and new testaments. Jesus, the light of the world (John 8:12), fulfills Israel’s vocation to be light for the nations (Isaiah 42:6, 49:6), as Simeon proclaimed

¹ Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, 21 November 1964 Ch. I, The Mystery of the Church, #1.

(Luke 2:32), highlighting the unity of God's plan of salvation, Israel's privileged place, and the fulfillment of the plan in Christ.² John the Baptist pointed to another, saying that he himself was not the light. So too the Church bears witness to Jesus, not ourselves.

The Church asked the right question during this session of Vatican II. What does the Church say about herself?" Twenty years after the close of Vatican II, a Synod of bishops stated: "The Church will be made more credible if speaking less of itself, it preaches more and more of Christ crucified" (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:23).³ We can acknowledge our need to speak more of Christ and less of ourselves, while also holding that the Church needs to speak out clearly about who she is. At its core, the Church is Jesus Christ; his person is our focus.

The same Synod suggested the need for a universal Catechism, so that the richness of the faith would be outlined in an accessible format and available to all the faithful. What a gift that Catechism has been. Some are taking part in "The Catechism in a Year" podcast. It is well your time to read or re-read it.

We are called to be a beacon of hope, a light for the nations. The shift in title from simply "The Church" was prophetic, as it did not fully encapsulate why the Church exists, merely stating **that** we exist. The richness of the Church is so much deeper. Not only **can** we be this beacon of hope and light to illumine the dark corners. We must be. This is our true call at this moment in history. We are truly called from the womb to be a light to the nations. Let us embrace this challenge and this call.

² See Douglas Bushman, "Light for the Nations: Themes of 'Lumen Gentium', Fifty Years Later". Found in *Catholic World Report*, 12 November 2014.

³ Final Report II. B, a, 3. *L'Osservatore Romano*, 16 December 1985, p.7