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Today in our Gospel lesson we hear this:

¹⁹ And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed.

In this particular Gospel according to John, we know that the darkness is symbolic of our separation from God because God's truth is presented as "light," while false teachings are presented as "darkness." I would add that our opinion is similar to the darkness that John uses in his Christology or his understanding of who Jesus is and how our opinion or our false understanding of God in Jesus Christ is symbolized by darkness. And this is the context of our Gospel lesson today.

We have before us in the Gospel a conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus. Nicodemus is a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin, which is a legislative and judicial assembly of elders who according to scripture, Moses and the Israelites were commanded by God to establish courts of judges called Pharisees. The Pharisees were the established authority of Jewish Law and the most devout of Jews; however, today we hear that Nicodemus is drawn to Jesus's teachings. Just prior to today's Gospel lesson we hear this at the beginning of the chapter of our lesson today:

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We hear that Nicodemus came to Jesus by night or in darkness, Greek word "σκοτία" which is the absence of light. This becomes very significant because from this same Gospel Jesus says:

'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.' (John 8:12b)

And a little later in this same Gospel Jesus says:

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separated from Jesus and from the darkness of his Pharisaic opinion he enters into the light of Jesus and Jesus begins teaching Nicodemus that:

“Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. (John 3:14-15)

In this comment of Jesus there are two words that we may just have the wrong understanding of or a mistaken opinion about. We are told that Jesus is lifted up so that we may have eternal life. Our darkened opinion undergirded by our misunderstanding may be that this comment is very final or completed. We could say that it is a fact that by the cross that Jesus is lifted up on, we in turn overcome this world we know right now. But the Greek word indicating that Jesus is lifted up is *ὑψόω* and this means that this is much more than a one-time act. And this changes our “facts.” This word means that Jesus is lifted up, yes, but lifted up doesn’t mean he is elevated...it means that Jesus is exalted. And from this we then understand, Jesus is exalted not just on the cross but also in the resurrection and ascension so this is not a one-time act; it includes the cross, resurrection, and the ascension of Jesus Christ. And our faith and our belief in the crucifixion, the resurrection, and the ascension of Jesus Christ is our salvation...it is our “eternal life.” In his high priestly prayer, Jesus tells us what this eternal life is:

³And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

To know God, to believe God, is to be in that light that is Jesus Christ, that is eternal life, or *αιώνιος* which is the Greek term for eternal. To shine a little light on this word, *αιώνιος* is to understand that “eternal life” is not a life that we move into once we are dead, we do not escape this life with eternal life...to parse this out literally means age-long and addresses a quality rather than a time. This eternal life is the Light of God, or the Kingdom of God...it is the Kingdom that was, and is, and will be. Eternal life is our life in faith, it is the Kingdom we enter into NOT by our moral achievements, rather we enter into it through our faith and through what has been wrought by God...by the exaltation of Jesus Christ on the cross, in the resurrection, and in the ascension...and that life is now...just as it was life then and will be the life to come through our very belief in Jesus Christ.

So, when we hear Jesus say to Nicodemus and us to today: And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, this “judgment” is NOT achieved at the end of everything, it is the light in which we walk each day of our life, it is the light of exaltation that is wrought by God for us in Jesus Christ. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, this is the light of our understanding, NOT our opinion, it is the light of faith that is the grace and salvation that is handed to us in the bread and wine of this Holy Eucharist...it is the light of grace we take into the world and not our opinion about that light. Saint John said this way in his First Epistle:

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⁵ This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; ⁷ but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸ If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (1 John 1:5-10)

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

"God helps those who help themselves." I think its safe to say we have all heard this statement and its association with the Bible. "God helps those who help themselves." I have been told that this is a true fact...it's a true fact because the Bible says that God helps those who help themselves. My response when I was told this during a Bible study was, "well, if that's a fact, how'd that work out for us in the garden?"

According to the person attempting to convince me of this, he knew for a fact, that this was in the Bible. For those who are sitting here right now wondering where in the Bible this is found, I can tell you...no, its not in Proverbs or Psalms, no, its not one of the "knucklehead" disciples in the Gospel of Mark saying this, nor is it from some obscure story in the Old Testament. It's like Noah's wife's name...it's not in the Bible.

This saying is illustrated in two of Aesop's Fables and is a similar sentiment found in ancient Greek dramas and used by Benjamin Franklyn and has been commonly attributed to him because of his association with it. But NO...it's NOT in the Bible.

The wording of this "fictitious axiom" is actually from Algernon Sidney (*15 January 1623 – 7 December 1683*) who was somewhat of a controversial English politician and political theorist who lived in the 1600s and because of his political stance was executed for treason. After his death, Sidney was revered as a hero and martyr and not because he helped himself.

I think we all get the inspired self-initiative within the statement but the FACT is that it is NOT in the Bible. But according to some "*opinions*" out there the FACT remains within those opinions, this is in the Bible! I mention this particular statement because it epitomizes what seems to be a fashionable tend today...our opinions have become our facts. I saw a headline of an article the other day that stated:

86% of American 15-year-olds can't distinguish fact from opinion. Can you?
The statistics for American adults aren't that much better.

The key takeaways form this article were this:

The results of the 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment show that just 13.5 percent of American 15-year-olds could reliably distinguish fact from fiction in reading tasks.

A 2018 Pew Research Center study showed that more than half of U.S. adults had trouble identifying fact from fiction after reading a list of 10 statements.¹

This all is so controversial today and feeding this ongoing debate is our broadcast news and mass media...with who's right, who's wrong, what is fact, what is fiction, what is opinion, and how

¹ From an article found on this web site: bigthink.com/the-present/opinions-facts/
From mediabiasfactcheck.com/big-think/ Big Think – Bias and Credibility was rated LEAST BIASED. These sources have minimal bias and use very few loaded words (wording that attempts to influence an audience by appealing to emotion or stereotypes). The reporting is factual and usually sourced. These are the most credible media sources. This web posted: Overall, we rate the Big Think as least biased based on story selection that is generally pro-science and objective. We also rate them High for factual reporting due to proper sourcing of information and a clean fact check record.

can I spin it all into an illusion of a believable fact. All I will say is this, as a kid I remember that broadcasted news reported what happened and the opinion about what happened were the special feature known as the closing comments of the news broadcaster themselves. Now opinions seem more the feature on the events covered by broadcast news rather than just a closing commentary.

God helps those who help themselves. There is no way this sentiment could be found in or even thought of as being part of Holy Scripture because it essentially flies in the face of the teachings of God through Jesus Christ. Helping ourselves in this context or in this idiom means that we can take what we would like or we can take something without permission and God would help us to do so and NO this is not my opinion...it is ungodly and seems very dark.

Today in our Gospel lesson we hear this:

¹⁹ And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed.

In this particular Gospel according to John, we know that the darkness is symbolic of our separation from God because God's truth is presented as "light," while false teachings are presented as "darkness." I would add that our opinion is similar to the darkness that John uses in his Christology or his understanding of who Jesus is and how our opinion or our false understanding of God in Jesus Christ is symbolized by darkness. And this is the context of our Gospel lesson today.

We have before us in the Gospel a conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus. Nicodemus is a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin, which is a legislative and judicial assembly of elders who according to scripture, Moses and the Israelites were commanded by God to establish courts of judges called Pharisees. The Pharisees were the established authority of Jewish Law and the most devout of Jews; however, today we hear that Nicodemus is drawn to Jesus's teachings. Just prior to today's Gospel lesson we hear this at the beginning of the chapter of our lesson today:

¹ Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ² He came to Jesus by night and said to him, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.' (John 3:1-2)

We hear that Nicodemus came to Jesus by night or in darkness, Greek word "σκοτία" which is the absence of light. This becomes very significant because from this same Gospel Jesus says:

'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.' (John 8:12b)

And a little later in this same Gospel Jesus says:

As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world. (John 9:5)

Darkness is the absence of light or we can say the absence of Jesus. Nicodemus under the vale of darkness approaches Jesus, he comes into the light, where as Judas after betraying Jesus we hear Judas immediately goes out into the darkness. In the vale of darkness, Nicodemus is

separated from Jesus and from the darkness of his Pharisaic opinion he enters into the light of Jesus and Jesus begins teaching Nicodemus that:

“Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. (John 3:14-15)

In this comment of Jesus there are two words that we may just have the wrong understanding of or a mistaken opinion about. We are told that Jesus is lifted up so that we may have eternal life. Our darkened opinion undergirded by our misunderstanding may be that this comment is very final or completed. We could say that it is a fact that by the cross that Jesus is lifted up on, we in turn overcome this world we know right now. But the Greek word indicating that Jesus is lifted up is *ὑψώω* and this means that this is much more than a one-time act. And this changes our “facts.” This word means that Jesus is lifted up, yes, but lifted up doesn’t mean he is elevated...it means that Jesus is exalted. And from this we then understand, Jesus is exalted not just on the cross but also in the resurrection and ascension so this is not a one-time act; it includes the cross, resurrection, and the ascension of Jesus Christ. And our faith and our belief in the crucifixion, the resurrection, and the ascension of Jesus Christ is our salvation...it is our “eternal life.” In his high priestly prayer, Jesus tells us what this eternal life is:

³ And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

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