Since the beginning of time, God has given us the beauty of the juxtaposition between light and darkness. In Genesis, we read of God creating day and night, light and darkness. Humanity has had to wrestle with this dichotomy in every essential aspect of life. The mystery of darkness lures us...beckons us...to conquer that which we cannot master or overtake.

We have sought...since the time of Adam and Eve...to find innumerable ways to do what only God can do...and that is precisely to take the darkness and bathe us in light. The struggle between light and darkness has really been reduced to a process of discernment for the human spirit: do we follow the light of God’s plan for us or do we willfully thwart it and thus enter into a dark space whose piercing isolation is simply about ourselves.

Saint Pope John Paul II, in his Easter Vigil homily of 2002, said: “After the tragic night of Good Friday, when ‘the power of darkness’ (Lk 22:53) seemed to have prevailed over the One who is ‘light of the world’ (Jn 8:12), after the great silence of Holy Saturday, in which Christ, having completed his work on earth, found rest in the mystery of the Father and took his message of life into the pit of death, behold at last the night which precedes ‘the third day’, on which, in accordance with the Scriptures, the Messiah would rise, as he himself had often foretold to his disciples. “Night truly blessed when heaven is wedded to earth and man is reconciled to God! This is the night of nights, the night of faith and hope. While all is shrouded in darkness, God—the Light—keeps watch. With him there keep watch all who hope and trust in him.”

We keep watch because we have come to know that God is light and that in Him there is no darkness.

We are called—with this knowledge—to be ever vigilant in striving to walk to the light.

Our human nature necessitates our having to wrestle with some profound tension centered around trust and freedom, a capitulation to One whose desires and dreams for us often don’t correspond to our own. We find ourselves in uncomfortable places because of our lack of trust in God’s providential plan for us enslaves us. We mortgage away the keys which unlock human freedom and potential in hopes of not being inconvenienced into getting outside of ourselves.

Sister Nancy Usselmann, of the Daughters of Saint Paul, offered a beautiful meditation for us yesterday on how we can grow in Christ by being everyday mystics.

She reflected, “We are entering this holy week, we are here as we celebrate the Sacred Triduum, and what a Holy Week it is...we are all sequestered ourselves with our families...we are trying to connect virtually with our friends and with our church. In the midst of this we can be wondering...what is God trying to tell us through all of this? What is his message to us during this time?

We can take this time about being sheltered in our homes as really an opportunity to go deeper in our faith, deeper in our relationship with Christ and perhaps before now it has been a rather moderate relationship. God wants us to contemplate our relationship with him.”
The Sacred Scriptures we have just heard proclaimed speak in a tangible way of the march through human history...from the mystery of creation...to the summons of Abraham who shows complete fidelity to God...and the deliverance of the Jewish people from the snare of Egyptian slavery. In the Book of Exodus, the Lord calls on the Israelites to go forward. Their going forward gives us, their heirs, the inheritance we share in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. “I will sing to the Lord, for he is gloriously triumphant.” Imagine what went through the minds of the Jewish people as they assessed before them the grand response of God to their plight.

Yes, Moses and the Israelites sang to the Lord, roused by thanksgiving and deliverance. Yet, they could not have even remotely imagined what God had in store for them as their children in faith stood at the empty tomb and found that Jesus was not there.

Despite all that God had done for them, the Jewish people sometimes wandered on their own to find a more convenient, less heart-wrenching way. We find that...although out of a profound sense of love and freedom God gives us reason, wonder, and exploration...we ultimately find the answer back to God. That was the experience of our ancient ancestors and it is indeed our experience this holy night.

The elements of light and darkness permeate the human struggle to choose. Do we choose death or life? Do we choose darkness or light? All along the circuitous and sometimes bumpy road of human history, God draws us closer to that decisive moment when we have to choose whether to surrender...whether to trust...whether to say an emphatic “Yes!” to God.

We feel this most deeply these days when life has changed so dramatically for us. So much that we have taken for granted eludes us as we face an invisible threat to our way of life, leaving in its wake death, enormous strain on our nation’s health delivery system, and profound economic uncertainty.

Yet, this is also a time of great grace for us, as we are forced by circumstances to reflect on the truly important and fundamental things in life. In many ways, we are returning to the life that God had intended for us all along: to speak time with our families, eating meals together, praying and spending leisure together.

One of our school dads called and told me he feels like he is getting to know his children for the first time. This is a time of privilege; and especially this Easter grace transforms us anew as human beings—to be more ardently configured to the person of Jesus Christ.

In his book Remember Jesus Christ, the Capuchin Father Rainero Cantalamessa writes, “Christ is more real than ever, and a creative new proclamation about him is urgent. We need to make people understand that believing in Jesus Christ is something extraordinary and marvelous and enriches life immensely. It opens a new dimension within our being, and we never again feel alone at the core of our being and soul. It throws open the door toward that infinite Light that John speaks of in his gospel. The extraordinary thing about the light of Christ is that, in its essence, it is supreme love.”

On this holy night, all of human experience...of hope and love...of heroic service and selfless devotion...of dark moments of indifference and heartache...lay claim to the discovery of Jesus’ companions at the tomb, as described in Matthew’s Gospel. We, like they, cannot be distressed or downcast. We bring everything of ourselves to the tomb as a gift to the One who has given everything of Himself to us.

Hold tenaciously to the light of Christ...be fearful yet joyful...be not afraid!