In today’s reading from Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians, the apostle declares: “We walk by faith, not by sight.” His words have been taken up and made the theme of a popular modern hymn, one that I am sure many of us know. Although one can understand what Paul is trying to get at in saying what he does, he could just as well have said that we walk by faith and by sight. Sight in this context embraces not only our ability to see with our physical eyes but also our capacities for knowledge and insight, for everything from the common sense that gets us through our daily routines and responsibilities to that more sophisticated knowledge that takes the form of science and technology and that enables us to respond to challenges like those of the COVID 19 pandemic and the phenomenon of climate change.

Faith is of a different nature. It does not oppose reason and thought but complements them. It respects and encourages the development of our minds and of whatever other gifts we have that might enable us to deepen our understanding of the world and of human life. As important as that is, even more important is the fact that it opens up for us a world that goes beyond anything we can know using only the natural gifts that are ours.

To be a person of faith is to have at least some initial sense or awareness of something or someone to whom we are drawn and whom we can approach with our minds and hearts even well remaining incapable of truly comprehending him.

The deeper our sense of God becomes, the more we realize how much he transcends or goes beyond all that we can think or imagine.

If our original experience of God can be described as of one of radical mystery, that mystery has taken on a whole new meaning for us in the person of Jesus. Christian faith embraces both faith in God and faith in Jesus. God draws close to us in Jesus and in doing so reveals himself in a deeply human way. For us, Jesus is the sacrament of God.

In the Gospel of John, more than in the other Gospels, Jesus speaks of himself and his mission in terms of light. “I am the light of the world,” he once said. “Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” In another passage, he evokes the same image when he says; “I have come as light so that everyone who believes me should not remain in darkness.”

Whereas the other Gospels tend to emphasize the way of life to which Jesus calls us, John insists above all on the importance of faith. In his mind, to believe in Jesus is ultimately to believe in the Father who sent him. Faith in Jesus and faith in God are inseparable. The whole purpose of the teaching, life and destiny of Jesus is to reveal God, to reveal the mystery at the heart of God. Those who see me, Jesus once declared, see the Father. It is above all in this sense that Jesus is light for us. In his life and teaching and, in a special way, in his death and resurrection we are given a path that leads us into the mystery of God.

That mystery, for John, is above all a mystery of love. “God so loved the world,” John says, “that he sent his only Son to be our redeemer and the Son so loved us that he gave himself for us.” Meditating on texts like these, the author of the first letter of John concludes, “God is love.” Even as we assent to that, God remains for us an incomprehensible mystery, but a mystery we are now invited to think of as a mystery of self-giving love.

There are times in our life when we find ourselves enveloped in darkness, unsure of the road ahead. Reason and knowledge, as essential as they are in so many areas of life are not enough to overcome the darkness. At such times we need to turn to the Gospels and to hear again what they have to say about the person and life of Jesus. In doing so we will find the light we need to confront and overcome the spiritual darkness through which we might be passing.