

August Light

August has always been a special month for me. First of all, both my parents were born in August, and without them I would not be here to share my offbeat thoughts with you. In addition, two very dear Dominican friends were born in August, so my celebration extends beyond my biological family to my Dominican family. Moreover, the feast of Holy Father Dominic is on August 8th, giving all us Dominicans a reason to celebrate: without our founder, we friars wouldn't have our beautiful white habits to drag through spaghetti sauce and to spill coffee on.

The celebrations of August are not merely earthly; even the heavens appear to be celebrating! You see, August is also the month of the Perseid meteor shower, which peaks this year on the 13th. What's that? Allow me to answer in the words of StarDate: "An increase in the number of meteors at a particular time of year is called a meteor shower. Comets shed the debris that becomes most meteor showers. As comets orbit the Sun, they shed an icy, dusty debris stream along the comet's orbit. If Earth travels through this stream, we will see a meteor shower. Depending on where Earth and the stream meet, meteors appear to fall from a particular place in the sky, maybe within the neighborhood of a constellation. Meteor showers are named by the constellation from which meteors appear to fall ... the Perseid meteor shower is so named because meteors appear to fall from a point in the constellation Perseus."

<http://stardate.org/nightsky/meteors>

Perhaps you are not aware of these celestial fireworks. That may be because of light pollution caused by our increasingly urban lifestyle. StarDate suggests how you might remedy this problem and rediscover the August glory which God showers upon us: "If you live near a brightly lit city, drive away from the glow of city lights and toward the constellation from which the meteors will appear to radiate." Far from the distractions of the city, God's magnificence becomes visible.

Isn't this exactly what we are experiencing in the Gospel for the feast of the Transfiguration, which we hear on August 6th - or 19th if your parish follows the Julian calendar? "...Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them; His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became white as light." (Matthew 17: 1b-2)

The world has its own lights: the neon and the glitz are not only distracting, but they are often in direct competition with God's light. Contrary to God's way, the earthly lights often seek not only to lead us away from God, but also away from salvation and toward our own destruction. It is important for us to get away from the distractions: we need to take our bearings, making sure that we are being led to a safe harbor by the light of Christ, and not being led to destruction by a material siren song every bit as dangerously seductive as the one which enticed the hero of the Odyssey.

Perhaps this need for detached reflection and openness to wonder is why the monks of our eparchy have dedicated two monastic enclosures to the Transfiguration. We can't all be monks – nor should we be: that life is certainly not for everyone; we can, however, learn from them how to appreciate the gift of heavenly light which God showers upon all willing to open their eyes. Now, as for getting the stains out of my once-pristine white habit...

-Fr. Jim Karepin, op