

The Fourth Sunday of Lent – March 18-19, 2023

Sight is a wonderful gift, but what we learn in today's readings is that what we see with our minds and hearts is of even greater value.

God helps us to see clearly. We have examples of that inner vision in all of today's readings.

Our first reading takes us back 1,000 years before Christ when the prophet Samuel was called by God to choose a king from among the sons of Jesse of Bethlehem. All of the sons had the dignity and physical characteristics of potentially good leaders, but God knew who would make the best king. Jesse, the father, assumes that his youngest son cannot be the one chosen by God. But God is clear that his perception is not the same as ours; what God values is not the same as what we value.

In today's second reading, St. Paul uses the theme of darkness and light to draw a contrast between a life that is "pleasing to the Lord" and a life of "fruitless works of darkness." Paul tells us that we have been enlightened by Christ. The light that enables us to live in goodness and truth comes from the Lord.

In today's gospel we hear how a man born blind not only had his eyes opened by Christ but his heart and mind as well, whereas the religious leaders – the Pharisees – who claimed to be able to see were blinded their pride.

Jesus makes it clear that it is easier for God to heal physical blindness than willful refusal to see God at work. Most of us struggle with some level of spiritual blindness; after all, most of us do not get to directly witness the miracles of Jesus. God does not always act in ways that are easy for us to recognize. The Pharisees, though, are choosing blindness. Having their eyes opened would challenge the system they are in which keeps them comfortable in power. What God reveals is not always comfortable or easy.

We are sometimes called to sacrifice and use our positions of privilege to speak up for others in ways that are unpopular, but, if we **want** to see, God can heal our

spiritual blindness too. The Pharisees are comfortable with their blindness and unable to recognize how much they don't see. We, too, are often content to remain in ignorance, especially when God's light reveals truths that are uncomfortable. We don't find it easy to examine our consciences too deeply. For example, we know that God sides with the oppressed, and so we would rather not know when we have ignored or benefitted from their oppression.

Like the people in the gospel who challenged Jesus' actions and the man's belief, we, too, can choose to stay in our blindness or we can choose to receive the gift of sight. But to be able to see we must first recognize and admit our own blindness. Unlike Jesus, we can be tempted to stay in our safe harbor, keeping with individuals who are similar to us. There we all think the same, look the same, disapprove of the same things and people. Such blindness can keep us from recognizing as Jesus did, the value of each individual regardless of who what he or she is or does.

Like the Pharisees we can misjudge others because of religious prejudices we have learned; like the man's parents, we too can be frightened to get involved in any controversy, especially with a powerful and unjust authority. There is so much finger pointing in this gospel; so much accusation of sinfulness. The man born blind, his parents, and Jesus himself are all accused by Jesus' opponents. The once-blind man is finally driven away by the Pharisees. Yet, like the Samaritan woman in last Sunday's gospel, we see his progression in faith from simply knowing who Jesus is, to calling him a prophet and then proclaims that Jesus is from God. When Jesus finds him in the temple and reveals his identity, the man makes his profession of faith in Jesus.

There is a positive message in this once-blind man's profession of faith, but the overall message is quite a challenging. At the end of this gospel we hear that the world is divided into two groups: those who know they are spiritually blind and ask for and receive sight from Jesus, and others who refuse to admit their blind and are

even blind to being blind. Jesus said: “I came into this world to divide it, to make the sightless see and seeing blind.” We were born spiritually blind. We inherited this from our first parents Adam and Eve. Our sight was restored when we were reborn in baptism. Nevertheless, we continue to have eye problems because of our sins. What does it take for us to be healed? We must confess our sins, and Jesus will again restore our spiritual vision. As heard in the gospel: “the man went off and washed, and came back able to see.”

Actually, this is the work of Lent. All the prayer, and fasting and almsgiving are meant to reveal places where our lives are keeping us from God, and to aid us in turning away from them, uncomfortable though it may be to do so.

We can also put an even more positive light on today’s readings. In many ways we all struggle and search for ways to speak about what life in Christ really means for us. However, it goes beyond words so we turn to stories. This is why the gospel of John spends so much time with the story of the man born blind. John does not use the word miracle but speaks of signs. Today’s gospel story is a sign of what Christ brings to the world. Jesus opens us up to life in a new way. He brings a new dimension, a new depth.

For us it is as radical a change as what this man experiences—seeing the world for the first time. Now we can see, not just as humans see, but as God sees. We see what is most real. We see beyond appearances. We see with the heart.

The light for this kind of seeing is all around us. And it changes the way we see. We see others differently. We stop judging people by the way they look, or what they have. We begin to see others as they are, in their uniqueness. We learn from them. We see ourselves differently too. We stop judging ourselves according to what others think of us. We begin to see ourselves as God sees us. As we are, as we are loved. And so we become more loving toward ourselves and free to change.

We see life differently. It is no longer about choosing sides, or using others, or hoarding things. Life is not something we have to fight, or something we must endure. We see life as a gift. We savor it. We begin to use it differently. Life becomes an adventure. It offers one opportunity after another.

This way of seeing changes everything. It doesn't mean that life becomes easy. There may still be hardship, pain, and suffering; but because we are different, they will not defeat us. Even there, we will see the seeds of growth. And we will know that we are never alone.

Lord – open our eyes to see, and to continue to see as you see. Give us the light we need to live as children of light.