



March 27, 2022

Fourth Sunday in Lent

*"If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say,
'We see,' so your sin remains." —John 9:41ⁱ*



Dear Friends;

One day a parishioner asks me, *"How are you?"* I responded, *"I'm beautiful."* She said to me, *"You can't be beautiful you're a man, you're handsome."* I said, *"You're a victim of binary thinking. Why can't a man be beautiful, and a woman be handsome?"* One of the challenges of our time is getting beyond dualistic thinking. Dualism polarizes us. It sees the world through the lens of opposing opposites—black or white, up or down, left or right, saint or sinner, good or evil, conservative or liberal. Human beings do not fall into opposing poles. Rather we are a mix of many elements, sometimes contradictory elements, together on a continuum.

We try to arrange the world according to our idea of perfection. We decide what or who is included and who is excluded. One group appeals to obedience to law, tradition, and family/ethnic ties. These lean in the direction of nationalism, fascism, ethnic supremacy, and dictators. Another group tries to create order by appealing to reason, understanding, logic and education. These can lean in the direction of anarchy, moral relativism, elitism and ignore the non-rational part of humanity.

Neither of them will succeed because they do not incorporate the negative which will always be present. Franciscan Friar Richard Rohr says, *"The greatest enemy of ordinary daily goodness and joy is not imperfection, but the demand for some supposed perfection or order."* We forget there is no perfection this side of heaven. In our perfectionism we fail to see the darkness we create. Everything has a shadow side. Only when we grow beyond the prison of it is *"either this or that"* can learn not to panic and live with the imperfect.

In today's Gospel of John, Jesus is steering us away from a *"this or that"* mentality. The disciples see a man who has been blind from birth. They come from a culture that taught them that physical imperfection is the result of personal sin. So, they ask Jesus a binary question. *"Is the man's blindness a result of his sins or those of his parents?"* Jesus gives them a surprising answer, *"It is neither the sin of the man or his parents. It is an opportunity for the healing work of God to be revealed."* Jesus cuts through the polarizing question.

The real question is, *"Who is this Jesus who works a cure on the Sabbath?"* The Pharisees who challenge Jesus inhabit a world of black and white. They believe physical illness or deformities are the result of personal sinfulness. The rules must be maintained so that God will favor them. God will not work through those who deliberately break the Law of God. For them God only works through the law. The trouble is God doesn't always follow our rules. And they, and we, do not know how to deal with that fact.

Sabbath rest was a humane institution. It reminds people that life is not about the endless drudgery of trying to make money. We don't live to work but work to live. There are other things that are more important than the pursuit of wealth. The Sabbath was meant for restoration. Sabbath was re-creative time to renew bonds of family and faith. These are values worth protecting. So, all kinds of rules developed to protect the sacred time of Sabbath. But the rule-keepers became blind to the original purpose of the Sabbath. It became about the rules not about the God who restores our world.

Jesus heals on the Sabbath to teach us that people are more important than our rules. The meaning of Sabbath was about God's care and concern for the health and welfare of humanity. We cannot just write people off as beyond God's concern. God desires to heal. But in their obsession to keep the Sabbath holy they became blind to mercy and compassion. They become blind to the Jesus who comes to reveal the light of God's compassionate love. They only see a "law breaker." They do not see that God does work beyond the limits of their vision.

In contrast the blind man clearly sees who Jesus is. Jesus is the compassion of God. But to see Jesus as healing and light we must realize our ideas about the world fail us. As Pope Francis likes to say, *"People are more important than ideas."* We can only come to see God when we realize the limits that shadow our vision. And come to see him in those who are different from us. As in another gospel story about the healing of a blind person, we must approach Jesus and say, *"Lord I want to see."*

Peace,

Fr Ron

Esta carta está en español en el sitio web: www.anne.church

ⁱ On the third, fourth and fifth Sundays of Lent we change to Cycle "A" readings since we have Elect at the parish who are preparing for the Easter Sacraments (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist). There are prayers for them based on these readings.