

## **030208 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent Light and Blindness**

If I were to put one of you on the spot and ask you what was the message... or what theme or themes you heard in the readings today.... What would your answer be? Anyone? Okay – Two themes or one if you combine them: BLINDNESS & LIGHT. The Gospel story keeps emphasizing that the man was blind from birth. To heal him then means the beginning of a completely new life, a life where he can see. He will enter a new world of brightness. Not to know Jesus is to live in blindness and darkness. In fact, this story is an illustration of Jesus' statement: "I am the light of the world". Blindness is a great Biblical symbol of spiritual blindness, the darkening and distortion of our vision.

In this Gospel, Jesus makes a kind of a strange salve and puts it on the eye of the blind man. Just as we, in the Church use ordinary matter such as water and bread and wine to be used in sacraments or sacramentals. Jesus used ordinary earth and maybe we might even consider this use of earth as a symbol of God's original creation or building up of man – A-dam... meaning -- from the earth.

In this Gospel – the blind man is a beggar – he doesn't own anything... he's an outsider... He is a person to be avoided. People see his blindness as a direct cause of sin – but since he was blind from birth – the people of those days would see his blindness as a sin passed on from his father.

There is Biblical precedent for 'seeing' that some of the illness and calamity of our world is a result of sin... and of Original Sin.

By the time the man washes in the pool, when he is able to see, he becomes a disciple of Jesus. And in terms of a Gospel message for us – healing of our blindness is the logical and inevitable outcome. Once we really see Jesus, we are hooked.

I hope all of you have had the opportunity in the past, or that you will take the opportunity to participate in the glorious Easter Vigil. As a symbol of what has just been proclaimed to us in the readings – especially the Gospel – at the Easter Vigil we start with a darkened Church and a procession of entry. We enter the Church together from an outside gathering place – and as we enter, the light of Christ is shown as the Easter Candle brought forward into a darkened world. Jesus who gave birth to the Church – Jesus who turns darkness into light... Jesus who heals our inability to see... Jesus the Savior of the world made manifest. And that is one of the ways to understand what Scripture is teaching us today.

Now let's tackle this issue of 'who sinned?' just as the disciples quickly got into that with the Lord at the beginning of today's Gospel. Many of us have lost loved ones... I lost my younger brother Eddie due to the ravages of lung cancer in his 40's. And just two weeks before we left Colorado – on an early Saturday morning, I was called by a distraught – very emotional husband. His wife had suffered a miscarriage of a child – the infant was just two months in the womb and his wife went into very premature labor.

The child couldn't survive – the pastor was away and so they called me... crying.. please come... please tell us what to do.... In other events, some loving spouses have suffered the loss of their marriage partner before it might be expected to happen... Some of you suffer from chronic illness.... Tell us Lord Jesus – who's sin is it that caused these things... JESUS – WE'RE BEGGING YOU FOR AN ANSWER!

And Jesus does respond – an answer in faith – not from the priest or the deacon – but from our Savior... Neither he nor his parents sinned... it is that the works of God might be made visible through him... through this action.... And we ponder these words... how can an infant dying seven months before normal birth give demonstration of God's power... Well – I am not God and neither are you... we don't understand God's works or plans... our ways are not those of God... But I can tell you that when my young brother died – his death with dignity and with cancer ward nurses falling in love with him... these may have been components in my journey towards becoming a deacon. Could that be a part of God's plan? I don't know... but in some way it seems connected now.... Somehow – my thinking has been illuminated with a new vision of God... not a God who makes babies or loving brothers die too early.... But a God who brings goodness out of all things... even those things that I struggle with understanding.

The last point I'd like to make concerning this Gospel is with regard to the parents of that blind man in the story. They were his family, just as we are church family here at this parish, St. Philip.

You may have someone who you know here who has become reconciled with the Church... just as I talked about a healing in my spiritual life. Perhaps someone becomes a convert and is in love with Jesus and starts to be on fire.... Are any of us as 'family members' just like the parents of the blind man today... are we like the family that doesn't want anyone to get too excited... let's not get too emotional about this 'change in your life stuff...'

So like the parents of the blind man... this family here might say, "We're not looking... we're not seeing... we're not going to mention anything..." They are just going to look the other way... this is a form of blindness – a different form of blindness in those of us who don't want to get too excited about this Jesus or faith stuff... I mean it's all good and well to come to Church on Sundays – but for heaven's sake let's not get excited about anything... Can you see this angle also contained in the Gospel story? Do you... do I... do we have any of this 'I don't want to get too excited' sort of blindness holding us back?

The point that convicts me – the point I think we need to ponder for today is that the real sinners in the Gospel were those who were filled with judgment... about the blind man... about the reason for his blindness... about being the church leaders of those days... the friends and family of the blind man... They would not open their hearts to what had become obvious... Christ has entered that blind man's life and he was never going to be the same. Today... here in this mountain Church – there are conversion stories... there are healing stories.

There are faith reversion stories that we ought to be applauding the Good God for... we ought to be recognizing the way his grace has worked in and through his people. Are we holding back? Brothers and sisters: You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. God's inspired word has just invited us... it has told us: Live as children of light. In blindness no more.

Peace be with you.

### **Reading 1**

1 Sm 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13

The LORD said to Samuel: "Fill your horn with oil, and be on your way. I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem, for I have chosen my king from among his sons."

As Jesse and his sons came to the sacrifice, Samuel looked at Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD's anointed is here before him." But the LORD said to Samuel: "Do not judge from his appearance or from his lofty stature, because I have rejected him. Not as man sees does God see, because man sees the appearance but the LORD looks into the heart."

In the same way Jesse presented seven sons before Samuel, but Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen any one of these." Then Samuel asked Jesse, "Are these all the sons you have?" Jesse replied, "There is still the youngest, who is tending the sheep."

Samuel said to Jesse, "Send for him; we will not begin the sacrificial banquet until he arrives here." Jesse sent and had the young man brought to them. He was ruddy, a youth handsome to behold and making a splendid appearance.

The LORD said, "There—anoint him, for this is the one!" Then Samuel, with the horn of oil in hand, anointed David in the presence of his brothers; and from that day on, the spirit of the LORD rushed upon David.

### **Responsorial Psalm**

Ps 23: 1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6

**R. (1) The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.**

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. In verdant pastures he gives me repose; beside restful waters he leads me; he refreshes my soul.

**R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.**

He guides me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil; for you are at my side With your rod and your staff that give me courage.

**R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.**

You spread the table before me in the sight of my foes; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

**R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.**

Only goodness and kindness follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD for years to come.

**R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.**

## **Reading II**

Eph 5:8-14

Brothers and sisters:

You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light, for light produces every kind of goodness and righteousness and truth. Try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.

Take no part in the fruitless works of darkness; rather expose them, for it is shameful even to mention the things done by them in secret; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore, it says: “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.”

## **Gospel**

Jn 9:1-41 or 9:1, 6-9, 13-17, 34-38

As Jesus passed by he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

Jesus answered, “Neither he nor his parents sinned; it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him. We have to do the works of the one who sent me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva, and smeared the clay on his eyes, and said to him, “Go wash in the Pool of Siloam” —which means Sent—.

So he went and washed, and came back able to see. His neighbors and those who had seen him earlier as a beggar said, "Isn't this the one who used to sit and beg?" Some said, "It is," but others said, "No, he just looks like him." He said, "I am." So they said to him, "How were your eyes opened?" He replied, "The man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and told me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' So I went there and washed and was able to see." And they said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I don't know."

They brought the one who was once blind to the Pharisees. Now Jesus had made clay and opened his eyes on a Sabbath. So then the Pharisees also asked him how he was able to see. He said to them, "He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and now I can see." So some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, because he does not keep the Sabbath." But others said, "How can a sinful man do such signs?" And there was a division among them. So they said to the blind man again, "What do you have to say about him, since he opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet." Now the Jews did not believe that he had been blind and gained his sight until they summoned the parents of the one who had gained his sight.

They asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How does he now see?" His parents answered and said, "We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. We do not know how he sees now, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him, he is of age; he can speak for himself." His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if

anyone acknowledged him as the Christ, he would be expelled from the synagogue. For this reason his parents said, “He is of age; question him.”

So a second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, “Give God the praise! We know that this man is a sinner.”

He replied, “If he is a sinner, I do not know. One thing I do know is that I was blind and now I see.” So they said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” He answered them, “I told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again?

Do you want to become his disciples, too?” They ridiculed him and said, “You are that man’s disciple; we are disciples of Moses! We know that God spoke to Moses, but we do not know where this one is from.” The man answered and said to them, “This is what is so amazing, that you do not know where he is from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if one is devout and does his will, he listens to him. It is unheard of that anyone ever opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he would not be able to do anything.” They answered and said to him, “You were born totally in sin, and are you trying to teach us?” Then they threw him out.

When Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, he found him and said, (Do you believe in the Son of Man?” He answered and said, “Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?” Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, the one speaking with you is he.” He said,

“I do believe, Lord,” and he worshiped him. Then Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see might see, and those who do see might become blind.” Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not also blind, are we?”

Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you are saying, ‘We see,’ so your sin remains.

The Gospel of the Lord.