

March 26, 2017

Fourth Sunday of Lent - Cycle A

Blindness is a tragic condition. The difference between light and darkness is as profound a contrast as we can imagine. We who are blessed with vision can hardly imagine a world without eyes.

Everyone holds a sense of great compassion for a blind person. We are grateful to God for our own sense of sight.

Even for a person with sight, the darkness can be frightening. Think how often we turn on and turn off lights in our house. We take it for granted, but what would we do without light?

Dylan Thomas has warned us: “Do not go gentle into that good night, / Old age should burn and rave at close of day; / Rage, rage against the dying of the light.”

Of course there are different kinds of blindness and different types of darkness.

St Paul in our 2nd Reading points out how people had been living in darkness, but were now living in the light of the Lord. We are challenged as we heard to “walk as children of the light, for light produces every kind of goodness and righteousness and truth.”

At baptism – the adult being baptized or the parents in the case of a small child are handed a candle lit from the Easter Candle with the words: “Receive the light of Christ”. Keep it burning brightly. Keep that flame alive in your heart, the priest or deacon tells the newly baptized. In the early days of the Church, “illumination” was actually the name used for the sacrament of baptism.

The blind man in our Gospel passage represents the world of darkness and what the light of God can do to transform human lives.

The light of the world is Jesus. He is both illuminates our journey and is the light toward which we all travel.

The man born blind is not given a name for he represents all of us – those who have come to believe in Jesus and those still searching for the light of Christ.

The man, who is healed, moves from physical to spiritual sight, while nearly everyone else in the story misses the point. This young man humiliates the great doctors of the law with his simplicity and truth. He has no formal learning but his wisdom is much more profound than their own. It is kind of like the wisdom of the cross being more powerful than the wisdom of the world.

With his physical sight and his spiritual insight the man recognizes first that it was Jesus who cured him, that Jesus is a prophet, a man of God, and finally Jesus as the Lord he must worship.

In the last two weeks we have heard Gospel stories about two very unlikely prophets and bearers of the Good News – a Samaritan woman and a blind man.

It is not age, beauty, physical strength, or other worldly standards that matter; it is not social position or status or education or even a good character that is preferred. God chooses whom he chooses to bring his light and his message into the world.

God saw in David, the insignificant overlooked shepherd boy, the potential of being the chief shepherd of his people. Despite his humble beginnings the spirit of the Lord will guide David and he will establish a great nation.

The house of David will be renowned and in a future generation another shepherd will spring from the root of Jesse, of the family of David. Jesus is the Good Shepherd we sang about in the 23 Psalm caring not only for the whole flock, but for even the single one of us who might stray away.

As we learn from the different reactions of the blind man and the Pharisees the "light" that is Christ both illuminates - and blinds. It reveals the love of God in our midst - but it can shine harshly on those elements of our lives we would prefer to keep in the shadows: our fears, our prejudices, and our selfishness. In the light of Christ, our un-Christ-like behaviors and attitudes are seen for what they are.

Our failure to "see" Christ in the faces of the poor and marginalized is betrayed. As Jesus tries to tell us, blindness is no sin, but choosing blindness, refusing to see and to act to help those in need is.

In the remaining days of Lent may we truly endeavor to "see" with the light of Christ and look beyond labels and stereotypes, self-interest and old scores, and recognize the presence of Jesus in all those we encounter.

This Tuesday evening the Sacrament of Confession/Reconciliation is available here at Holy Family – as we celebrate the first of the Regional Penance Services. Take advantage of this opportunity.

May God grant us the vision that the blind man receives in today's Gospel: to see the love of God present in all things.

Spend today consciously looking for signs of God's love in the people you meet, in the natural world, and yes even in the daily news. Goodness is there if we open our eyes to see it.

We mourn this weekend the loss of a man who received the light of Christ and brought that light to so many - Cardinal William Keeler – the 14th Archbishop of Baltimore who died this past Thursday. He dedicated this building 20 years ago. He ordained Father Rob and me to the diaconate and Fr Rob to the priesthood.

He was devoted to interfaith and ecumenical dialogue and cooperation. He worked to provide scholarships for at risk and needy inter-city children so they could attend Catholic schools. And he began in 1992 something called the Lenten Appeal – now known as the Archbishop’s Annual Appeal - which is the reason I am still standing before you. Since 1992 this campaign has raised over \$70 million in support of area Catholic schools, the needs of the poor, support of seminarians, and other charitable and spiritual development efforts.