

## **Fourth Sunday of Lent March 26, 2017**

Readings: 1 Samuel 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9, 1-41

The central theme of today's readings is that God makes everything new in and through Jesus Christ. We are children of the light baptized into the glory that is Christ. We are initiated into the life of Christ who is the light of the world. Once we are baptized in Christ we become his new creation, the members of God's own family. Today as we enter the fourth Sunday of Lent we are called upon to renew ourselves and experience the loving invitation of our Lord. In the early church those to be baptized and public sinners were called upon to understand that Jesus alone is the new life. In the first reading we have Prophet Samuel going in search of the new king in place of Saul who was not faithful to the Lord. When he finds David son of Jesse, God tells the prophet to anoint him because God himself has chosen him to rule over his people. Samuel anoints a new king for God's people. In the Gospel of today presents us Jesus as the light of the world. We have today the marvelous story about the cure of a man born blind. Jesus tells them that he must perform the works of him who sent him while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work. Once the blind man is cured, he is able to see Jesus as his Lord, something the religious leaders were unable to do. In the second reading Paul reminds the Ephesians that faith and Baptism rescued them from the darkness of sin and introduced them into the light of Christ. Paul invites all Christians to live as the children of light and judge everything by the light of Christ.

The First Reading of today tells us about the anointing of David as the king of Israel. In the Book of Samuel, David is presented as a musician first who was brought into the life of Saul to pacify him and later as a competent warrior who was very useful to Saul. Already King Saul had proved to be a person unfaithful to God and Yahweh rejects him and commissions Samuel the Prophet to go to Jesse of Bethlehem to anoint God's newly chosen king. None of the sons of Jesse who were present in the household were chosen by God. Samuel was clearly reminded by God that a calling is not based on one's outward appearance for God looks on the heart of the person. He quickly learns that the youngest one was missing as he was keeping the sheep. Samuel immediately sends for him and when David arrives the Lord tells Samuel to rise and anoint him for he is his chosen person. In obedience to God, Samuel anoints David in the presence of his brothers. From

that day on, the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David who ultimately becomes the King of Israel. Unlike Saul, David allowed the Spirit of the Lord to guide his steps. This tells us that God's choice is free and he is at liberty to elect whoever He chooses, for divine wisdom far surpasses human wisdom. Divine wisdom searches the soul, knowing every thought of the mind and knows those who will live as children of the Light.

In the Second Reading from the Letter to the Ephesians Paul reminds us to live as children of the Light. While the letter says that light produces every kind of goodness and righteousness and truth, the differences between light and darkness are frequently subtle and it is often more difficult to choose light than darkness. Sometimes, the light of suffering appears as unacceptable as the darkness of self-indulgence. The passage presents a contrast between those who live the life in Christ which is a life of light as against the pagans who are still living in darkness. Cautioning them from being influenced by Gnostic teachings, Paul reminds the Ephesians that once, they were in the darkness, which is the symbol of evil. But now, in the Lord, they are in the Light and as such, they must live as children of light. The fruit of the Light is all that is good and right and true and the children of the Light try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. Not only must the children of the Light not participate in the unfruitful works of darkness, but also, they have an obligation to expose them. Paul says that he hesitates even to mention what some people do secretly. Such a behavior has been promoting gossip and gives the appearance that sins such as adultery, promiscuity and divorce, are permissible because these seem to have become the norms of society. Paul completes his writing calling them to be alert to the Lord's teaching inviting them to stay awake and rise to permit the light of Christ shine on them. In other words, it is time to snap into reality and to embrace a spiritual mind by doing what is holy. Christ does not shine on those who remain in slumber and not heeding to light.

The story of the man born blind is clearly one of the real masterpieces of Johannine storytelling. The inner dynamic of the story shows the blind man in the process of coming to sight and faith in the son of man, while at the same time the Jewish leaders move towards blindness. Jesus sets the tone for the story by indicating that the man was born blind so the works of God may be made visible through him. Through this passage John presents Jesus as the light of the world. This passage forms the second of the three Baptismal themes given to us during

lent namely, light consisting of giving vision to the blind man, the others being water, with the woman at the well and life, with the raising of Lazarus from the dead. These powerful readings remind those preparing for baptism, as well as all those baptized, what this baptismal life is all about. In the Gospel we see here the drama of the will to accept or reject the call of Christ. The man born blind receives his physical sight early in the story, but the rest of the episode traces the birth of his spiritual sight. The story shows his growing awareness of who Jesus is. At first, he calls Jesus a man; then a prophet; then one from God; and finally, the Lord. He is able to recognize Jesus because he has the willingness to believe. His heart is open and he asks who he is so that he may believe in him. This attitude of willingness stands in stark contrast to the stubbornness and bad will of the Pharisees. Though confronted with the same evidence of physical healing, they try to explain away that evidence by interrogating the man and his parents, and then by portraying Jesus as a sinner. Finally, they literally throw the evidence out the door by ejecting the healed man from their midst. Surprisingly no one questions the miracle of healing by Jesus. But they question that he did it on a Sabbath day which shocks them.

John aim in presenting us with this marvelous story about the cure of a man born blind is to show Jesus as our light. Little attention is given to the actual healing miracle itself. When he is cured, he sees all material things around him and also is able to see Jesus as his Lord, something the religious leaders were unable to do. John narrates that as Jesus and His disciples were walking along, they encountered the blind man. The disciples ask Jesus the reason for his blindness: whether it is his own sins or the sins of his parents. During the time of Jesus the popular belief was that there was a close link between sins and a chronic sickness or disability and that the sins of the parents could have their effects on their children. We remember when the paralyzed man was let down through the roof at the feet of Jesus seeking to be healed of his disability, surprisingly, Jesus' first words to him were, "Your sins are forgiven." Here Jesus clarifies the meaning of suffering in the life of a person. The blindness of the person has nothing to do with his sins or those of his parents. He is blind so that God's power might be seen at work in him. The healing of a blind man meant for him the beginning of a completely new life, a life where he can see. He could now enter into a new world of brightness. In fact not to know Jesus is to live in blindness and darkness. The reason why the man was born blind was to glorify God through the

manifestation of a miraculous cure. Without knowing it, the man was to become an instrument of God's power.

Jesus says that he is the light of the world. From these words, three things are made known. First of all, through the miraculous cure of the blind man, Jesus was identifying Himself as the Divine Light. Secondly, through the words, "we must work," Jesus was reminding His disciples that it was also their duty to perform the works of God. Thirdly, by stating, "While it is day," Jesus was indicating that the grace of God was at work while the Divine Light was present, therefore facilitating the conversion of those who were present. When the grace and the Light of God are no longer present, nor the light that is being carried by Christians, there is spiritual darkness. Then Jesus does something very human. He spits on the ground, makes mud-paste with saliva and spreads the mud on the man's eyes and tells him to go and wash himself in the pool of Siloam, which means "sent." It was a common belief that spittle has the properties of medicine and brings about some healing. The blind man obeys him and returns with his sight fully restored. Within hours, the miracle of healing the blind man became the center of controversy. Some even thought he was a look alike and not the blind beggar. On questioning he clarified that he was the same person and explained how a man named Jesus gave him sight. When taken to the Pharisees he gave the similar explanation and they instead of accepting the miracle started criticizing him that he healed on a Sabbath day. In fact, Jesus had healed the man on the Sabbath and the methods he used were a violation of the letter of the Law. Their argument went that if Jesus truly were from God, he would not be breaking the law. But the Blind man now healed, filled with faith confessed that Jesus is a prophet. He held on to it even standing with his parents, for he was now able to see Jesus clearly.

The entire story of healing places before us an important human problem namely the problem of suffering and the way Jesus removes the suffering from the person. While the primary theme is healing and light, we have a person who experiences the patience, understanding, selflessness, compassion, kindness, mercy, pity, empathy and concern of Jesus. Beyond his physical suffering the blind man has to endure the misunderstanding and rejection by his own people while Jesus gives him the positive hope. The blind man of the gospel story seems to have acquired many of the virtues that can come through suffering. He was once trusting of others, and was willing to be dependent on them. Through injustice, harshness and abuse of power at the hands of the Pharisees, he

remained open enough to be able to grow in his contact with Jesus. Even his cure brought its own form of suffering, in the Pharisee's attempt to get him to admit that Jesus did not heal him and in his parents' desertion because of their fear of being expelled from the worshipping community in the Synagogue. The man's parents were prepared to sacrifice their integrity rather than suffer such a punishment. They knew that if anyone accepted Jesus as the Messiah would be expelled from the synagogue. So the parents push the argument back to the son: he is an adult; he is well able to answer for himself. We are aware that suffering is inevitable in our life but misery is optional. Of course wisdom does not come only from suffering, but from suffering reflected on, accepted and assimilated. The blind man understood the full meaning of his suffering and even rejection from all those close to him but received the gift of understanding and faith. He says that if Jesus is not from God he could not do this miracle of healing. Finally when the man is expelled Jesus goes in search of him and finds him and reveals to him that he is the Messiah.

Although the healing of the physical blindness of the person and his reduction of physical suffering was instantaneous, his growth in spiritual sight was gradual. He grew from his vague perception of the savior as the man called Jesus to boldly proclaiming that Jesus is a prophet and finally turning his back on his lack of parental support and the hostility of religious leadership to recognize Jesus whom he had never actually seen face to face, as the Lord whom he worshipped. Again while the blind man came to see the persons who were able to see physically became blinder. The self-centeredness, hardness of the heart of Pharisees made them more blind, a quality of persons who have not really experienced real suffering. With his healing Jesus presents us with the theme of light where he is the light. This reading reminds us that by nature, we are all born spiritually blind. Our blindness ends when we were admitted into the Body of Christ through the Sacrament of Baptism. What is important in today's world is to recognize suffering and work hard to overcome suffering by giving it the spiritual meaning. In the end he is in the light, because Jesus is the Light of the world. As the blind man confessed Christ before others, through our Baptism we were called to plead the cause of the Light. If we are rejected because of our spiritual calling, let us rejoice, for it is Christ Himself Who is being rejected through our testimony.

A nurse on the pediatric ward, before listening to the little ones' chests, would plug the stethoscope into their ears and let them listen to their own heart. Their

eyes would always light up with awe, but she never got a response equal to four-year old David's comment. Gently she tucked the stethoscope into his ears and placed the disk over his heart. 'Listen', she said...'What do you suppose that is?' He drew his eyebrows together in a puzzled line and looked up as if lost in the mystery of the strange tap - tap - tapping deep in his chest. Then his face broke out in a wondrous grin and he asked, 'is that Jesus knocking?'

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