

Fourth Sunday of Lent (For use with RCIA)

Reading 1

[1 Sm 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a](#)

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.

or

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HOMILY

Authors of great literature tell a story by describing events and presenting the interaction of various characters. In *Les Miserables* Victor Hugo tells a classic tale of sin and redemption. We are all familiar with the story. The main character Jean Valjean, an ex-convict is relentlessly hunted by Inspector Javert. Valjean glimpses compassion and is challenged to live an honest life when the local bishop, Myriel, refuses to accuse Valjean of theft and gives him silver candlesticks he has stolen. Valjean learns to love and care for another when he adopts Cosette, the daughter of a prostitute. Valjean finally understands mercy and redemption on his deathbed when he glimpses the Glory of God. Each of these characters and their interaction with Jean Valjean reveal a struggle between good and evil, sin and grace, light and darkness, compassion and hatred. The novel is about one character. The truth about that one character, however, is revealed in relationship with others.

Today's gospel is about Jesus and his interaction with a man born blind. We usually concentrate on the man born blind and the miraculous cure he receives through the action of Jesus. To understand more adequately this well known passage, however, we have to turn our attention to some of the supporting characters. The actions of the disciples, the parents of the man born blind, and the religious leadership, all reveal elements about the complex process of conversion to faith in Jesus the man experiences.

The disciples first notice the man born blind and address the question of evil in the world. Is the man blind because of his own sin or the sin of his parents? There must be a reason for this great tragedy! There must be an explanation for the experience of deprivation, blindness, and darkness. Jesus states clearly that it is to reveal the Glory and the power of God. Jesus steps into this experience of evil and brings healing. The man born blind does not approach Jesus, does not appeal for healing, but is passive at this point in the story. Jesus, God, entered into human suffering and limitation to reveal God's power and will for humankind ~ that we might move from darkness to light, from isolation to community, and from derision to acceptance. The power of God is revealed when human suffering is diminished. The glory of God is perceived when the human person begins to assume more fully his or her capacity to see what is good and to act for it; when the human person begins to live a new life.

We find ourselves this evening thirsting like the woman at the well and yearning to see more clearly like the man born blind. In our thirst and yearnings we begin to perceive the gentle call of God to live in the world in a new way. Like the disciples we cry out wondering about the source of our human suffering and pain and simultaneously question what good comes from our struggles. Like the disciples we begin to understand that God's healing is experienced in pain and divine assistance can be present in struggle if we but allow God into the process of growth and development. In this time of Lent we touch the pain of our lives that we might be open to God's healing and embrace the struggles we face that we might be strengthened by God's compassion and love.

And yet that movement into the new reality of God's compassion and love is not a simple journey. It is a journey that is impeded to often by fear. The parents of the man born blind refused to admit what God has done for their son because they feared being associated with Jesus. Although we can assume that they were joyful that their son was healed, they could not risk associating with Jesus because he was upsetting their understandings of God, good, and evil. They could not risk identifying with Jesus because their colleagues and friends would also be put

at risk. Their relationships would have to change. Fear is a powerful force, and fear of social rejection kept the man's parents from coming to faith, from proclaiming that God is real, that God was working through Jesus, that God was doing something unexpected.

It is indeed difficult to be different from everybody else. It is disquieting when we stand out in a crowd. In our fear and disquiet we often simply join the crowd. Oh, inside we reassert our faith in Jesus, but publically we assert that faith is a private reality. We present that right and good are not absolutes but opinions of society, and that everybody has the right to hold their opinions unchallenged and that majority opinion within society and government determines what must happen. During Lent, however, we find ourselves gathering in the shadow of the cross. The cross upon which a man was right, and good, and just, who was God's love was executed because of public opinion and fear. We stand chastised and challenged to relinquish our fear of being different in a world and within a population that is being wounded by majority opinion.

Fear of being ostracized by the community is not the only instance of fear in this text, however. Fear on the part of the religious leadership is almost palpable. If God is truly working in the person of Jesus, then religious leadership and political leadership must change. This change would necessitate relinquishing power and influence. It would require new categories of clean and unclean, of worthy and unworthy.

Change always elicits fear, particularly among those who benefit from the present system. Change always elicits resistance, especially when the present system has been presented as good, and just, and holy. Change always elicits resistance, especially when we have been convinced the values upon which the system has been constructed are virtues rather than vices. We have been told that profit in unregulated free markets will guide the system to stability ~ even when the desire for unregulated profit is founded upon greed. At the end of the last century efforts at healthcare reform were defeated largely because people feared that they would not be able to choose their own doctor, or have access to the hospital of their choice, or would be denied the most advanced, experimental treatments. Concern for choice, personal access, and receiving the best of care has left millions of persons without access to the most basic care. As long as our children are safe in suburban, private, or charter schools it is easier to turn away from the plight of children who are in underperforming schools. Any change requires new categories of clean and unclean, of worthy and unworthy, of us and them.

During this season of Lent we are confronted with our God who became human. We recall the words of St. Paul who proclaimed that "He who knew no sin was made sin for us." God chose to become unclean, unworthy, one of them, that we might come to know God's love for us.

Having experienced God's love in the Risen Christ we are challenged to be people who can respond like the man born blind. The man Born Blind came to know of God's love and power through an interaction with God's Son Jesus. He was a man who experienced healing and was willing to proclaim the great that occurred and identify that the event was a gift from God. We are challenged to make these proclamations without fear of being distinct from others. For we revel this distinction, we revel in the knowledge that God continues to heal, to forgive, to offer salvation to all people. We are challenged to put aside the values that so often shape what we perceive. We are invited to view our concerns, our needs, our passions, and those things for which we spend our lives and energies in light of a what God desires for us and indeed for the entire world ~healing, forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life.

Rev. Joseph Benedict