

4th Sunday of Lent cycle A

Light versus darkness, and sight versus blindness are frequent reoccurring themes in the Gospels. But even though the blindness which Jesus heals in today's Gospel passage is real, it is also symbolic; light in the Gospel is in reference not to natural light, but to supernatural light. And so darkness and blindness are used to represent sin. And so this weekend, we encounter in the Gospel the man born blind. And as they pass by him, his disciples ask Jesus "who sinned: the man or his parents?" And Jesus replies "neither." But that doesn't mean that the man's blindness isn't real, or that in this instance it doesn't denote sin. It wasn't the man's *fault*, or his parent's *fault*—it's not punishment for any kind of perceived wrong-doing. It just was. In a sense, it was like original sin, which all men inherit, but which is not our own individual fault, simply a reality of human existence, an affliction which has come upon the whole human race, and to understand it we have to understand sin as being that which separates man from his Creator. The question which is placed before the man born blind is, does he want sight? In this instance, Jesus doesn't ask the man the question outright, but he makes the first move to restore the man's sight: made clay with his saliva, smeared it on the man's eyes. But then the man must do his part in response: Jesus tells him to go and wash in the Pool of Siloam. So he went there and washed, and then came back able to see. He had to choose though, had to agree to go to the Pool of Siloam; just as we must subject ourselves to the waters of baptism. His sight, like our salvation, is a free gift from Jesus, but is a gift which we ultimately have to choose to receive.

It had to a been a moment of incredible wonderment for the man: to see all the shapes, the colors; to see the faces attached to the voices he had been listening to all those years. But eventually, he must have had to lay eyes on things that he may have wished he had never seen. Most of us have: I still remember the film I was subjected to in high school that nearly made me pass out, of the bloody hip operation; wish I had never seen that. I wish I had never seen so many of the images of 9/11; I wish I had never seen the remains of an abortion; so many depictions of the violence and cruelty which mankind is capable of, that I just wish I had never gotten lodged in my mind. The gift of sight is wonderful, for the most part; but it requires having to take in some things which are disturbing, unsettling, and unnerving at times; it's the price you pay.

Since sight, and light, stand for faith, so too will living the life of a disciple not always be easy to practice. If you have no faith, you may worry about whether or not there's an afterlife, but probably don't worry so much about individual salvation. People who have the gift of faith, though, have to struggle with the fear at times of rejecting eternal with God. We have to wrestle with sins: try with all our strength to hold our tongues, control our desires, do the right thing; while, if we had no faith, we would likely operate more by feelings and desires. To have a relationship with God means experiencing guilt at times, knowing that we've sinned against him and that our sins necessitated his saving actions on the cross. And to possess this light means to

do without so many of the pleasures and luxuries of this life, so that we will be sufficiently invested in the life to come. No matter what cruelties the man born blind was eventually subjected to seeing, though, it had to have been worth it to see everything else. And we need to remember that no matter what demands or sacrifices arise from our being in this relationship with God, it is worth it, because of what we have. We have hope: and not a superficial, hoping against hope for the best kind of hope, but real hope, based on facts. We have every reason to believe that what God has said to us is true, because we have historical evidence; just visit the Holy Lands, or Rome, to discover how true all this is. And we have peace, knowing that we are doing everything in our power to stay right with God; and we have a quiet conscience, because we've either avoided or repented of sin. In the end, the benefits of the gift far outweigh any difficulties and challenges.

Even as the man born blind was given his sight, the Pharisees were holding on even tighter to their sightlessness. They would rather not see, in the sense that they would rather not know what sin truly is and what is truly a sin. And they wouldn't believe that the man born blind was given his sight: they insisted that he must have had sight at some point in his life, certainly at least at birth, because it was never heard of that such a man had been given sight. And there are some today who just cannot believe in Jesus' revelation: who reject this whole notion of original sin, reject the notion of redemption and salvation, refuse to believe that the evidence is true and that the witness of two thousands years of saints is valid. Some times man doesn't want to see, because seeing would mean changing our understanding of our world, and changing our behaviors. But to be willing to see, to embrace this light of Christ, is to be like the man in the Gospel: answering Jesus' call by being willing to wash ourselves in the water; immersing ourselves in his life, and thereby also his death, and thereby also his resurrection.

Jesus said to the Pharisees: "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you are saying 'We see,' so your sin remains." Sin abounds because man, in his spiritual blindness, thinks that he already sees just fine: he will choose an assortment of self-indulgences, material comforts, newer this, shinier that, power here, control over others there; choose these things no matter what the cost to himself, no matter what the cost to others. When the man born blind was given his sight, it meant a lot more than simply going on with his life as it was only with being able to take in all the sights in addition; it was a huge lifestyle make-over. "Isn't this the one who used to sit and beg?" Not only were his days of begging for help over, he made the decision in the end to become a follower of Christ, along with all that that decision would entail. His life would not even remotely resemble what it had been before he encountered his Savior. And for man, it comes down to: would you rather see—as in, believe in Christ—or just settle for the familiar pleasures of this creation over and above a lasting relationship with the Creator? Paul wrote to the Ephesians: "You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of the light, for light produces every kind of goodness and righteousness and truth." Just as light is

superior to darkness, because it allows us to take in all the beauty, all wonders of the world around us, so are eternal joys superior to those familiar temporal ones. The man born blind did what he had to in order to have sight; we as Christians must do whatever is required of us to acquire the light, to have eternal life. The Pharisees were asked by the man given his sight “do you want to become his disciples, too?” They very much did not want to become that man’s disciples: did not want to see the truth, did not want to change their lives, did not want to accept the Savior. And for us, who are already incorporated into Christ through baptism, the question is slightly different, but constant: “do we want to remain as his disciples?” The required response, however, is much the same: be willing to be challenged, to change where necessary, to be rebuked at times, to become more Christ-like. “If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you are saying, ‘we see,’ so your sin remains.” May we have the humility to admit that sometimes, still, we can be blind; admit that still, we need to be given ever-increasingly better sight by Christ.

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