

ECHOING GOD'S WORD
in
THE CATHOLIC FAITH COMMUNITY
Fourth Sunday of Lent
March 19, 2023

Lectionary Readings:

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

The Lord chose David to be a king pure of heart.
Christ calls us to be holy and to love tenderly.
The touch of Christ brings light to one living in darkness.

BIBLE BACKGROUND:

John:

The healing of the man born blind continues the healing and conversion journey of the catechumens as they approach the Easter sacraments. The community of faith seeks to deepen its own sightedness, to acquire a clearer vision of God, of Christ, and of the works of the kingdom. We all seek the healing touch of Christ who is himself the Light of the World. There is blindness in each of us that will respond only to the touch of Jesus Christ the Lord. The Church also acknowledges its own limited sight, often its lack of insight. The Church calls upon Jesus to heal it, to touch its eyes, that it may see him as Lord and Master.

Jesus takes the initiative in healing the man born blind. The man is so very afflicted by his disability that he cannot even ask to be healed. His blindness has imprisoned him, sidelined him from society, even from the care of his family. Notice that he has to beg for a living; his family has given up on him. His parents end up disowning him for fear of the retaliation that can come to them if they identify too closely with him. He lives in the most desperate of conditions: in loneliness and alienation.

In this particular healing, Jesus uses a process involving human and material resources as part of the healing: spittle, rubbing the paste on the eyes, washing in the pool. There is a process to our coming to sight. Insight comes through the agency of human and material realities. The world in which we live contributes its elements to the steps by which we are healed of our blindness. We cannot hope to know Jesus Christ except that we use the resources that he has placed before us in the development of our faith.

Jesus rejects the popular belief that personal sin is the cause of infirmity and suffering. He insists that God can reverse the effects of nature, the condition of deprivation in which we find ourselves as human beings. God can show power and mercy toward human beings who suffer. God is not afraid of the work of the Devil in this world. God confronts the Evil One in his very works. Once healed, the man comes progressively to a deeper and deeper insight and faith concerning Jesus. First, he sees Jesus as *a man*: "*The man who put clay on my eyes told me to wash*" Then, he calls Jesus *a prophet*: "*He is a prophet.*" Finally, after Jesus has sought him out to strengthen him and console him, the man calls Jesus *Son of Man*: "*Lord, I believe!*"

Is it not ironic that as the man born blind progressively comes to more and more faith, the Pharisees are bent on an inverse progression? Some seem to be open at first but then become increasingly convinced that Jesus cannot be from God because he breaks the law of the Sabbath.

They have become locked inside their own convictions, not able to see the evidence that is right in front of their eyes.

The Jewish members of the early Church needed to be reassured that they, too, would be “found” by Jesus when they were expelled from the synagogue community because of their faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus will “find” us in our miseries and in our personal sinfulness; He will find the victims of the sin that is in the world. He will heal us if we are willing.

1 Samuel:

Despite all the political and military maneuverings that brought David to power, it is still the Lord who chose him and established him as king in Israel. God established David so that David could be God’s representative on earth. He is chosen because he is clean of heart. He is kept in power because he remains a loyal servant of God, despite his personal sinfulness.

Ephesians:

New Christians called to the community of faith in baptism are urged to ethical living, in conformity with their new identity as disciples of Christ. A different standard of behavior is expected of those who have been joined to the living Christ, not only in spirit but in their very bodies. The candle they receive at baptism signifies that Christ is their light, and they are to be light to others. The Letter to the Ephesians tells us something that we need to hear in the present age: moral behavior does make a difference in the lives of those who have been reborn in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We cannot live like those who have not been saved. The energy of the Holy Spirit has to find expression in our everyday behavior. Our new identity must be allowed to show itself in our deeds.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. The man healed of his blindness now can see things that those who always had their sight cannot see. What do people of faith see that remains unseen to people who have no faith? What progress have you experienced in your faith? Can you see and understand things now that you could not before even though you have always had faith? Can you explain the progression in your faith?

2. Were there times in your experience when you felt like an outsider? Were there times when you did not even feel loved by your own family members? Were there times when even your faith community was not supportive of you? Have you had the experience of having been sought out by Christ for personal reassurance and consolation? How did Christ reach out to you? Were there people in this?

3. Can you list some of the “blindness” that still afflicts our society, the world in which we live? Is there some “blindness” even in the Church community? What would you like to see healed by Jesus so that your environment might be more faithful to God’s purposes? Do you, perhaps, have a role in that healing?

PRAYER

**Father of mercy, you helped the man born blind to believe in your Son
And, through that faith, to reach the light of your kingdom.
Free your chosen ones from the falsehoods that surround and blind us.**

Let truth be the foundation of our lives.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Lord Jesus,

you are the true light that enlightens the world.

Through your Spirit of truth

free those who are enslaved by the father of lies.

Stir up the desire for good in the Elect,

whom you have chosen for your sacraments.

Let them rejoice in your light, that they may see.

(From the Liturgy of Scrutinies: The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults)

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

The **Sin of the World** envelopes us from the first moment of our existence. The Fathers of the Church called this condition into which we are born **Original Sin**. There is a blindness that prevents us from spontaneously seeing the presence and the power of God in the world. We cannot love as we should. We labor under a burden not of our making even before we add further handicaps to ourselves by our own deliberate sins. The sins of others have left behind twisted and warped conditions under which we must struggle. There are unjust and oppressive laws in this world. Human institutions are far from perfect. These do not always facilitate our journey toward the kingdom of God. The greed of the few brings starvation to the many. Corporations and institutions sometimes oppress and exploit people. Even the Church can contribute to the sin of the world in its crushing and uncaring power over people's lives.

Today in the world, the moral corruption of leaders and of decisionmakers contributes to the overall chaos that surrounds each individual in society. Laws and structures are used to keep people in bondage. Militarism, racism, sexism, materialism, consumerism, pornography, abortion-on-demand, perpetual welfare living, and many other powers oppress and exploit people.

Blindness does not only afflict people in their physical sightedness. There is a kind of blindness that resides in society itself, built into the processes by which the world conducts its business, in the way society treats persons. Although no single individual may be out there oppressing people deliberately, the very condition of society sometimes ends up being oppressive.

Our world is afflicted by its own pervasive blindness. That whole prevailing situation has been called sinful. It is evil. It is born of evil and it engenders evil in the lives of all those it touches.

Healing and insight begin with an awakening of faith and spirituality. The Son of God came into the world to bring the light of God to bear on this darkness. Jesus came to heal the blind: individuals who were physically blind, as a sign of the healing he was bringing to the spiritual blindness that assails everyone.

The Church shares in the ministry of Christ by offering the healing light of faith to those who live in this world. Through the preaching of the word of God, by baptism, by witnessing to the healing power of Christ, light comes into the darkness. The works of justice and peace bring new healing to the ills of society.

(See **The Catechism: # 385-389**)

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