

Physical and Spiritual Blindness

Lectio Divina of the Fourth Sunday A in Lent

Opening Prayer: Lord, we thank you that your word is a light to our path and shows us your way and your mind. Lord, may we think and see clearly what is true and what isn't. May the confusing speech of those who don't know you not influence or lead us. In a time of darkened understanding may we speak your truth articulately. May we stand for what is good and excellent even in the face of opposition. May we respond rightly whenever we are provoked. May we be filled with your truth and live it out in a way that honors you. In a time of discord may we truly be fountains of light, love, justice and mercy. May your goodness pour forth from our mouths. May our minds and hearts be continually focused on you and what is good, lovely, and excellent. Your word says that what we set our minds on will determine our words and actions. Enable us to set our minds on you so that we live according to your truth and discern your way. We pray that you would open the eyes of the lost to see the destructive path of wrong thinking. May the goodness of you and your truth become evident to those who don't know you. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen

First Reading from the book of 1 Samuel 16: 1, 6-7, 10-13

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. (**The Word of the Lord/ Thanks be to God**)

Commentary: For a long time, Israel had been ruled by Judges and Samuel was the last Judge. The pagan nations with their surrounded the Israel to fight with them. The Israelites were in panic. In spite of the Lord's warning and the wise advice of the elders, the people demanded a king so that they could be like other nations. Finally, the Lord granted them Saul as their first king (1030 BC). Though successful in many battles, Saul offended God, and the kingship was taken from him. The Lord then prompted Samuel to go to Bethlehem to anoint the next king. The first reading shows us Samuel's journey to find the Lord's chosen one and the ritual for anointing the new king. As an old and experienced judge who had seen how the first king (Saul) had failed, Samuel had his own ideas about whom God would choose. But God chose the most unlikely candidate, namely, David, the shepherd boy, the youngest son of Jesse. The reason He gave Samuel for this choice was: *"Not as man sees does God see, because man sees the appearance, but the Lord looks into the heart."*

Responsorial Psalm 23 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.

Second Reading: A reading from the second letter of St. Paul to the Ephesians 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. (**The Word of the Lord/ Thanks be to God**)"

Commentary: Paul reminds Christians of their new responsibility as children of light after their baptism in the death and resurrection of Jesus and a clothing with Christ: "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. Try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord." As children of light, our actions should reflect our faith. We should live above reproach morally so that we will reflect God's goodness to others. The Lord needs people who will take a stand for what is right and true.

Gospel Reading: A reading from the holy gospel according to St. John 9:1-41

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 (**The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ/ Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ**).

Meditation: Hard and Puzzling questions with no convincing answers

1. If God is good and loving, why there is evil and suffering in the world? (Known as the Problem of Evil in theology).
2. If God is all powerful, why can't He control the evil?
3. Why the innocent people suffer while the wicked people prosper?
4. Why natural disasters and tragedies happen and kill thousands in no times mercilessly? (Tsunami, Earthquake, Cyclone, hurricane, storms, fire and volcano...)
5. Why racial, political and religious insane atrocities against people who go to pray in mosques, churches, synagogues?
6. Why so many accidents happen every now and then?

Unpleasant Events: It is heartbreaking to see hundreds of innocent people and children in Ukraine were killed in the war by the Russian troops. So many precious lives and so much property is gone. Recently earthquake has destroyed more than 40000 lives in Turkey and Syria.

Unpleasant family situations: In families, homes and communities, we find some people going through agonies due to sudden death of their near and dear ones. There are some terminally ill, suffering life long. There are some physically and mentally challenged in the family who are going through untold pains.

How can we convince and comfort these people that God indeed loves them? We struggle to understand the reasons for tragedies. Sufferings are evil in themselves and we cannot justify them. We are not born to suffer but to live by God's grace. It is quite possible and reasonable and to some extent justifiable if they have some faith crisis in their painful life. As fellow human beings

and as a Christian community, our immediate response should be our empathy to them in whatever ways. Today's liturgy invites us to have a Christian perspective of pains and suffering.

First is the question of suffering: It was a common understanding during Jesus time that tragedy and illness were seen as punishments from God for their sin and the words of the disciples very well reflect this understanding, "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:2). From the beginning of time people have tried to understand why people suffer or why bad things happen to good people? Jesus clears this doubt by saying that this has nothing to do with sin of anyone but the works of God must be revealed in him. What is the point of Jesus here? Works of God? His suffering is not a disaster but an opportunity for greater things to happen in his life and in the lives of the people who come in contact with that person. So here, what we need to understand is that it is not God's punishment and God does not want to treat us according to our sins. Psalm 103:10 says, "God does not deal with us according to our nor repay us according to our iniquities" For some, suffering is a punishment for something. For some others, God is nothing in front of suffering and still others hold that God does not really care for us in our suffering. But God is like our Father and Mother who is very much concerned about us especially in our suffering because we are his children.

The second one is the question of physical blindness of the man. We see an interesting dialogue between the blind man and the Pharisees who want to know how he received his sight and who healed him and more than that they want to know whether the blind man believed in Jesus because according to them, Jesus is not from God since he did not respect the Sabbath. They did not want to accept it as a miracle from Jesus and so they criticized Jesus for nothing. They are not satisfied with the proof of the blind man and so they tormented his parents about his healing. They also witnessed the same thing. Truth cannot be hidden. Truth will always triumph. The physical blindness of the man is healed by Jesus.

The third one is the question of spiritual blindness of the Pharisees. The physical blindness can be healed but the spiritual blindness cannot be healed. The Pharisees themselves see, the blind man witnesses, his parents witness. In spite of all these proofs, they were blind spiritually. They had eyes to see but do not see, ears to hear but do not hear for they are a rebellious people (Eze 12:2). When the eye of the blind man was opened, the eyes of the Pharisees closed. We can enter the kingdom of God if we are physically blind and very hard if we are spiritually blind. In front of the previously blind man, the Pharisees become blind people because of their arrogance and hard heartedness.

The fourth point is the transformation in the blind man. The healing of the blind man, the raising of Lazarus, the forgiveness of the adulterer are all signs of restoration. Those who approached Jesus in humility, experienced tremendous healing. The blind receive their sight, the sinful receive forgiveness, the hungry are filled and satisfied, the lame walk, the sick are cured, people are made whole, the hopeless find hope, prisoners are set free, those who once mourned are filled with joy, the dead are raised and eternal life is inherited. There is life in abundance in Jesus. Like the blind man worshipped Jesus as Lord and Savior, let us continue our worship and joyfully worship Jesus as the light of the world. Amen

Concluding Prayer: Lord of Light and Salvation, we know that we are wrestling with darkness in the world. In our broken world, we see the darkness around us in the forms of violence, fight, killing, sickness and disease in our community and in many of our homes. Bring your light and restore presence to the dark places in our lives. Bring your hope to hearts that feel defeated. Yet in the midst of all these realities, you have called us to be the light of the world by sending your Son Jesus to dispel our darkness. May we continue to walk in your commandments, statutes and precepts in the Holy Bible. Lord, make our light shine in our job, career, education, business and family relationships. May you remove all sorts of darkness in our path. May Your glory rise upon us and all our doings now and always. Amen.