

Fourth Sunday of Lent A/2014

The readings of this fourth Sunday of Lent talk about God's judgment. They show us that God does not judge according to human criteria. He does not proceed, as human beings do, by referring to human appearances, pre-established ideas and external circumstances. He exercises his judgments according to his will and the divine prerogatives that look at the heart of the person. They invite us to enter Jesus' vision and to ask for help in order to understand God's judgments.

The first reading tells us the story of the anointing of David as the king of Israel. It shows that, contrary to what the prophet Samuel thought, none of the seven older sons of Jesse was chosen by God for the throne of Israel. The text evokes in particular the surprising choice of David, the youngest among his brothers, who was not even invited to the sacrifice presided by the prophet. Finally, the text describes the anointing of David in the presence of his brothers and how, from that day on, the spirit of God was upon him.

What is behind this text is the idea that God's ways are not human ways and his judgments are not human judgments. Another idea is the truth that while, as human beings, we judge by referring to external circumstances and physical appearances, God, on the contrary, looks at the human heart. The last idea is the truth that, for reasons unknown to us, God has a preference for the humble, the weak and the poor.

This text allows us to understand the stakes of today's Gospel that tells us the story of the healing of a man born blind. First of all, the Gospel starts with a curious conversation between Jesus and his disciples about the responsibility for being born blind, whether it comes from the sin of the man himself or that of his parents.

Then, the Gospel gives the answer of Jesus by showing that it was the fault of none of them. On the contrary, it was so that the work of God might be made visible through him. After that the Gospel describes the healing itself, how it happened through the smearing of the eyes of the blind man with clay and the washing in the Pool of Siloam.

The second part of the Gospel describes the encounter of the healed man with his neighbors, the Pharisees and his parents. It shows the controversy that followed and the doubt of the Pharisees that he was born blind. It equally shows the excuse of his parents, as well as the bad faith of Pharisees who treat Jesus as a sinner.

The last part of the Gospel describes the ultimate encounter of Jesus with the healed man. It shows in particular how he came to recognize him as the Messiah and to believe in him. Finally, the Gospel describes the reaction of the Pharisees to the whole speech of Jesus and the response of Jesus that they were blind because they remained in their sins.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today I want to talk about the limit of human judgment and the truth of God's judgment. In fact, we are used to judging people as well as situations. Most of the times, we judge by referring to circumstances of time and space, to what things seem to appear to us and to what we think about them. Eventually, we judge according to our feelings, our criteria and established ideas, be they bad or good.

Most of the time, when we do so, we limit ourselves to external circumstances and appearances. Whatever might be our judgment, however, there are a lot of things we do not know about people and the motivation that pushes them to act in one way or another. In the end, it means that our judgment is partial, because we do not have all the facts. God alone is the one whose judgment is impartial because he sees what is hidden in the human heart.

That is why Samuel was mistaken by thinking that the older sons of Jesse were fit to be king, while God did not choose them. The same is true about the disciples who were thinking that someone might have sinned so that the man was born blind, while it was not so.

In fact, what played in the mind of the disciples was a popular belief and pre-established idea, defended even today by some, which holds that disease and misfortune are a consequence of sin. For Jesus, it cannot be true, because every situation, in which someone is involved, be it that of joy or sadness, is an opportunity for God to manifest his glory.

In that perspective, what matters is not the cause of our sickness, but what God can do in order to heal us. In truth, God heals us in many ways, including through the use of human medicine. Another way God heals us is through the sacraments of the Church. In that sense, each sacrament is, in its own way, a manifestation of God's grace through which he shows us his mercy and his forgiveness in order to spiritually heal us.

In the process of healing in today's Gospel, Jesus mixes his saliva with the clay and anoints the eyes of the blind by telling him to go and wash his face. That points to the sacrament of baptism with its use of water and the anointing with the holy oil?

That being said, the challenge we face is that of accepting Jesus' healing power. In today's Gospel, the Pharisees did not do so. Even when they had evident proof because of the healing of the man born blind, they still treated Jesus as a fake prophet. In that circumstance, we understand why Jesus says that, though they had eyes to see, they remained in their blindness. In the same way, the parents of the man born blind were afraid to acknowledge publicly the healing of their son as coming from Jesus.

This period of Lent is a time of witnessing to the truth of Jesus as our savior and our Light through the darkness of this world. This is exactly what the healed man has done and what Jesus wants of us. This is clearly expressed in the Gospel by the fact that Jesus appears only at the beginning and the end of the story. He does so in order to let the faith of the blind man grow among the difficulties and hardships of life.

In fact, what Jesus wants of us is that we grow in our faith and give witness to him amid the conflicts and hardships of life. Let us pray for courage to bear witness to Jesus. Let us take advantage of Lent to become true disciples of Jesus. May God bless you all!

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



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