

Fourth Sunday of Lent A/2017 (2)

The readings of this fourth Sunday of Lent talk about God's judgment. They show that God judges according to the divine prerogatives that look, above all, at the heart of the person, while human beings judge by referring to the external look and appearances. They invite us to enter God' vision in order to understand his judgments.

The first reading tells the story of the anointing of David as the king of Israel. It shows how, contrary to Samuel's thought, none of Jesse's older sons was chosen by God for the throne of Israel. It also shows the surprising choice of David who was the youngest and the least experienced among his brothers. Finally, the text describes the anointing of David and his being filled with the spirit of God.

What is behind this text is the idea that God's ways are different from that of humans. Another idea is that, while human beings judge by looking at the external circumstances and physical appearances, God looks at the human heart. The last idea is related to the truth that God has a preference for the humble, the weak and the poor.

This text allows us to understand the stakes of today's Gospel as it describes the healing of the 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, it gives the answer of Jesus who declares that it was the fault of none of them, but rather 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 his 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 recognized Jesus as the Messiah and believed in him. Finally, the Gospel describes the Pharisees' reaction to the whole speech of Jesus and his response that they were blind because they remained in their sins.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today I want to talk about the eyes of faith. What do I mean by that? Before explaining to you what I mean, I want to tell you a story. In fact, in the town I grew up, there was a lady who was blind. I do not remember the circumstances surrounding her blindness, whether it was caused by a disease, an accident or by birth. In order to survive, she was continually begging.

Unlike you and me, that lady did not know the light of the sun or the brightness of the moon. Whatever might be the change of the seasons, her life was always the same, in continual darkness. Unlike, you and me she could not distinguish a house from a car or a man from a tree. She could not enjoy the beauty of stained glass or the colors of a rainbow.

However, in spite of her evident limitation and handicap, her other senses were very well developed, namely her hearing, touch, smell, etc. For instance, one day when I passed by, she suddenly exclaimed: “Who is there”?

That incident stayed with me the whole day long. I realized that even if she did not see with her own eyes, she did see in a different way. Then, I remembered the words of one of the French writers, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry: “What is essential is invisible to the eyes; one sees well only with the heart”.

I believe that the big challenge we face today is that of giving eyes to our heart in order to see the marvels of God surrounding us and his hand leading us throughout the meander of our human history. As long as we do not give eyes to our hearts, we can pass beside God coming to us and trying to restore us to full health. As long as our heart is blind we will never recognize his presence in the events happening around us.

Such a vision helps understand why, though some people might be physically healthy with their sight, nonetheless they might be spiritually blind. And I believe that the spiritual blindness is worse than physical blindness, because it prevents us from seeing the presence of God in action in the happenings of our life.

In fact, the whole discussion between the Pharisees and the blind man, between Jesus and the Pharisees in today’s Gospel, is all about the recognition of the state of physical blindness and spiritual blindness. Though the Pharisees pretend to see, they are, however, blind. Because of that blindness they cannot acknowledge the hand of God working in Jesus. They continue to treat Jesus as a fake prophet or a sinner.

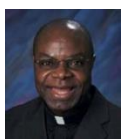
The spiritual blindness, indeed, is not a curse. It can be healed and God alone can heal it. The particular way God heals it is through the sacraments of the Church. Each sacrament, in fact, is, in its own way, a manifestation of the healing power of God who operates within it in order to save us.

For instance, in today’s Gospel, there is a whole process taking place in the healing of the blind man. In fact, Jesus takes saliva, mixes it up with the clay, smears the eyes of the blind man and sends him to wash. Once he does it, he can see. Such a process points to the sacrament of baptism with its use of water and the holy oil.

Jesus calls us this time of Lent to bear witness to him amid the difficulties and crises of our lives. That is why in the Gospel he appears only at the beginning and at the end of the text. The point is that he wanted that the blind man grow in faith amid the conflicts and hardships of life. Then, he can ask him if he believes in the Son of Man and the blind man can answer that he does. That is what Jesus wants for us too.

This week, 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



Homily Date: March 26, 2017

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Document Name: 20170326homily