

Fourth Sunday of Lent A2023

My friends, we are used to judge people and situations. Most of the times, we do so by referring to circumstances of time and space, to what things seem to appear to us and according to what we think about them. We judge according to our feelings and established ideas.

External circumstances and appearances play a big role in our judgement. 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. Our judgment is partial, because we do not have all the facts. God alone is the one whose judgment is impartial: he sees what is hidden in the human heart.

The prophet Samuel, following his human judgement, thought that it was among the older sons of Jesse that God chose the king to the house of Israel. He was impressed by the vigor and the look of the older seven sons of Jesse. Surprisingly he realized that God did not set his heart on any one of them. Jesse, too, was hoping to see one of his older sons become a king. But, he was astonished to realize that it was the youngest, who was less than a child, who was the favorite of God.

The choice of David, instead of his big brothers who were stronger and more capable than him, according to our human standards, shows us that it is in the humble, the weak, the fragile, the poor and the modest that God is interested. Therefore, where there is weakness, fragility and poverty, God can show his strength and his power.

This choice confirms what we already know by experience that we, human beings, are very often misleading in our conclusions by passing easy judgments on people and situations we do not fully know well or understand. The choice of David teaches us also that God's ways are not human ways; his judgments are not human judgments. We humans see the appearances, but God looks at the heart. We are impressed by the heroes of the world, like athletes, movie stars and politicians. Yet, the day we discover that they too are humans like us and capable of all the craziness of the world, we become disappointed.

The easy judgment on a complex situation appears also in the case of the man born blind. The disciples are asking Jesus over the responsibility of being born blind. Who has sinned for this man to be born blind, his parents or himself, the disciples ask? This question of the disciples expresses a popular belief and certain conception defended even today by some people that hold that disease and misfortune are a consequence of sin.

In his answer, Jesus opposes this popular belief with the reality of God's mystery that transcends human imagination. In fact, there is a mystery that surrounds the life of each one of us with its ups and downs, which we cannot fully understand. In the display of this mystery, God has his time to intervene and put an end to our misery and misfortune, as he did with the man born blind.

In that perspective, every circumstance of our life becomes an opportunity for God to let his glory shine. What matters is not the cause of our disease or misfortune, but what God can do within them in order to show his glory upon us and around us. Even if it happens that we are not physically healed, God can grant us a spiritual healing so that we cope with our sickness by living in peace. That has been true in the lives of many people who have experienced God's grace upon them in the worst of their health condition.

If any circumstance of life is an opportunity to show God's glory, then, by helping those who are in need, pain and suffering, we, as Christians, demonstrate God's glory to them. This is

one of the appeals of Lent: that we take advantage of this wonderful time of prayer and fast to do good to others through almsgiving. This is the appropriate time to do so and not tomorrow. We have to take advantage of the light of the day, work for our fellows and have our rest at night.

After Jesus had rejected the connection between sin and suffering, then he could heal the blind man. In the process of this healing, it is remarkable that Jesus mixes his saliva with the clay and anoints the eyes of the blind with the recommendation to go and wash his face. Here we have an allusion to the sacrament of baptism with its use of water and the anointment with the holy oil.

The healing of the blind man reminds us that God heals us through the sacraments we receive in the Church. Each sacrament, in its own way, is a manifestation of God's grace through which he shows us his mercy and his forgiveness in order to spiritually heal us.

The problem is always that of knowing if we really recognize Jesus' healing power and accept it. Two categories of people in today's Gospel did not do so, namely the Pharisees and the parents of the healed man. The Pharisees did not believe at first that the man was born blind. When they could not resist the truth that Jesus healed him, they considered Jesus as a fake prophet because he performed the miracle on a Sabbath day. And yet, what Jesus did was a wonderful work that gave glory to God.

Thus, Pharisees remained in their darkness and blindness despite that they had eyes to see. Moreover, as they could not destroy the argument of the healed man, they turned bitter and insulting.

This episode teaches us that we can easily have differences with people. But when it develops into insult and abuse, it ceases to be an argument; it becomes a contest in bitterness. In that case, what it proves is simple just that our case is weak and we are weak people.

Like the Pharisees, the parents of the blind man were afraid to acknowledge publicly the healing of their son as coming from Jesus. Here we see how fear can be paralyzing even in the presence of the truth. That is why Lent is an invitation to be courageous, an appeal to stand up and tell the truth of Jesus.

Very different is the attitude of the healed man who recognized Jesus as his savior and Lord. Quite striking also is the fact that Jesus appeared only in the beginning of the story and at the end. He does so in order to let the faith of the blind man grow among the difficulties of life.

What Jesus wants is that we, too, grow in our faith and give witness to him amid the conflicts and hardships of life. The outcome of this process was that at the beginning, only one was blind; in the end, many were blind and only one could see that Jesus was a prophet and Lord. May God bless you all!

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



Homily Date: March 19, 2023
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Contact: www.mbala.org
Document Name: 20230319homily