

Believing is Seeing
4th Sunday of Lent (A)
(Eph 5:8-14; Jn 9:1-41)

“*Lord, who is the Messiah, that I may believe in him?*” Jesus says, “*You have seen him*” (9:36-37). Throughout John’s Gospel, sight represents faith. For instance, when Thomas saw Jesus risen from the dead, Jesus said he believed because he *saw* him, but “blessed are those who *have not seen* and have believed” (20:29).¹

The man born blind represents mankind born with Original Sin. We are beggars, born into darkness because we are without sanctifying grace that unites us with God and completes us. Like the blind man, there is something missing, something lost: an empty darkness where there should be grace and light.

The washing which gives the man his sight represents baptism, by which we are restored to God. Through baptism we are no longer alienated from God, living in darkness. We are now “light in the Lord,” living as children of light (Eph 5:8). This is recalled in the baptismal rite when we receive the candle.

When God created Adam, He took some clay and breathed His Spirit into it, and the man became a living being. In today’s Gospel, Jesus takes some clay and puts saliva from his mouth into it, so that the man might become new and restored.

This was truly a great miracle, because the man had *congenital* blindness. It was not just a healing miracle that restored him, it was a miracle of creating something new that didn’t exist – a work only God can perform.

It is therefore ironic that the Pharisees, who claim to have great faith and devotion, couldn’t see God, couldn’t see that Jesus could only accomplish such a feat if the creative power of God were with him.

The Pharisees were blinded by self-righteousness. They didn’t believe they needed a savior, and so they were unable to recognize or accept Jesus the Messiah. We are often like the Pharisees, or like the doubting Thomas, who live by the phrase, “*seeing is believing.*” As long as I see something and understand it, I’ll accept it. But it should really be the other way round. In order to see, we must believe; not “*seeing is believing,*” but rather “*believing is seeing.*”

Faith is the gift that allows us to see. Faith is what sheds light on our experience. It guides and explains. Faith allows you know what lies beyond, and see the bigger picture of your life. We like to see everything first with our human

¹ Other examples: When the Holy Spirit came down upon Jesus at his baptism, John the Baptist “*saw* and testified that he is the Son of God” (1:34). When the two disciples want to learn about Jesus he says, “*Come and see*” (1:39). When John went to the tomb on Easter Sunday and found it empty, the Gospel says he “*saw* and believed” (20:8).

eyes before we commit ourselves. But this is a problem, because as we heard in the first reading, “*Not as man sees does God see, because man sees the appearance but the LORD looks into the heart*” (1Sm 16:7). To see the bigger things, to go beyond appearance and superficiality, to see what God sees, we need faith.

But it is not any kind of faith. People can believe in all sorts of things, but that doesn't necessarily help or save them. Jesus says, “*While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.*” The faith of a Christian, received in baptism, is very specifically *faith in Jesus Christ*. Only Christian faith saves. Besides faith, which is seeing, we need light, which is Christ. (Even if your eyes are completely healthy, they won't do any good if there is no light.) Jesus Christ is the “Light of the World.”

Most of us have been blessed with this faith since our infancy. This beautiful faith has been entrusted to the Church and handed on to each generation since the time of the Apostles. It is something lived out in the Church, and we recognize that it is greater than any particular individual. It contains inexhaustible riches, and a wisdom that transforms life and society. Unfortunately though, we often keep it on a shelf or in the closet, like some kind of precious family heirloom that just collects dust and remains unexamined and unused.

How does faith in Jesus Christ make a difference? How does it allow us to *see* things we could not see otherwise? The Gospel gives a few examples:

For one thing, faith gives a new meaning to **Suffering**. The disciples ask Jesus, “Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus said neither; “it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him.” Faith allows us to see suffering in a different light, the light of Christ and his Cross. Reason cannot understand how, but we know by faith that our suffering – originally a curse of original sin – is now a sharing in the Cross of Christ, and through it God's power is manifested. When bad things happen we don't punish or blame ourselves: Original Sin is conquered by Christ. Faith then allows us to take up our cross, and offer it with Jesus to the Father for the salvation of the world. St. Paul says of suffering: “I make up in my own flesh what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ, for the sake of his Body which is the Church” (Col 1:24).

Faith also gives new meaning to **Sin**. Sin is not what the Pharisees think, when they look down self-righteously upon the blind man as unclean because of his affliction, and when they look at how they keep all the commandments and think they are holy. What faith tells us, which reason can never grasp, is that even the greatest sins are not a problem for God when we approach Him in humility and contrition. On the other hand, if we are self-righteous, even the smallest sins will

remain unforgiven. We can easily “look good” on the outside, but be rotten on the inside, as Jesus said of the Pharisees: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within they are full of dead men’s bones and all rotteness” (Mt 23:27).

Christian faith means living a type of **Morality** where we are clean on the inside. Not only our outward deeds, but also our inward thoughts, are pure, and done in the light, so that there is nothing we are ashamed of, or need to hide in the darkness. As St. Paul says in that beautiful second reading, we live as children of the light, which produces every kind of goodness, and in the light of Christ we expose all the shameful works of darkness. This is exactly why we have the practice of going to confession: the purpose of confessing our sins is to no longer keep them hidden in darkness, but expose them to the merciful light of Christ, to the truth, so that they are unmasked and forgiven—so that we no longer have anything to be ashamed of; so that we can live fully, as “children of the light.”

Finally, Faith allows us to see the meaning and purpose of our life, what our **Mission** is. Christians do not speak of random coincidences taking place, or a blind fate governing our destiny, or good or bad luck. Faith allows us to see the Hand of God in all circumstances. Without faith, we question and lament, why was this man born blind? Looking at this painful and tragic circumstance through faith, however, we can see the presence of God in the most unexpected and unanticipated way. Jesus says, “this blindness is for the glory of God!”

Jesus made the man wash in the pool of “Siloam,” which the Gospel tells us means “sent.” Through baptism and our life of faith we discover God’s call. We are not meant to sit around all our days like beggars, trapped by our human handicaps. We are to get on our feet and go do the things God needs, by the power of faith. Faith allows you to see things about yourself beyond human limitations. Through faith you find your mission, the way you are “sent.”

In a few more weeks on Easter Sunday we will renew our Baptism promises. On the day of our Baptism, we were “washed in the pool of Siloam” and received the light of Christ. Have we allowed it to burn brightly, and taken up our Christian vocation, by which we are sent into the world as apostles of Christ? Through Baptism, the clay of our fallen human nature was reworked by the hand of Christ and our soul was regenerated by the power of the Holy Spirit coming from his mouth. Do we live as “*children of light*,” rejecting the “*fruitless works of darkness*” that are “*shameful even to mention*?” Like the blind man, we have been blessed with sight, with faith. Can we say with him, “Lord *I see you*. I believe, I adore, I will go”?