

4th Sunday of Lent A

“The Man Born Blind and Spiritual Vision”

Fr. Frank Schuster

And so, I was in 3rd grade. My desk was five rows back. My teacher loved using the chalk board, especially for math. It didn't take long that year for him to begin wondering about the strange look on my face, the squint of my eyes, the frustrated appearance, and the inability to answer questions pertaining to what was happening on the chalk board. Since my mom worked at the school, as the music instructor, it wasn't long before they had words and soon after I was sitting in a chair before an eye doctor. With the exception of the nasty eye drops they used back then, it was a tolerable experience. And, of course, the doctor said I had inherited by father's eyes and I would need to wear glasses. Oh, the doom. And so, afterwards my mom and I wondered through the showroom to find my first pair of glasses. And two weeks later, we received a phone call that the glasses were ready for us to pick up.

I will never forget that day. Up to that point in my life, I just assumed the world looked the way it did. I had no basis for comparison. Putting on the new pair of glasses was like going from a fuzzy 1970's television set with an aluminum reinforced rabbit ear antenna to a showroom top of the line wide screen HD display. My jaw dropped when I first put on the glasses and looked around at the world, the brilliant colors, the definition of distant objects and the crystal clear clarity. On the drive home, my mother had to put up with my incessant declarations, “Wow, I can see that sign all the way from here, can you see it?” To which, my mom would politely answer, “yes Frank”.

Now, the house we lived in at the time was in a wooded area by a river. Once we got home, I spent a good hour by myself standing on the banks of that river, amazed at how beautiful it was. The memory that sticks out the most was watching the wind blowing through the ocean of alder trees across the river and realizing that the leaves had a slightly different color on the front of the leaves from the backside of the leaves that created a dramatic shimmering effect as the wind blew through the forest. It might seem silly to you, but for me it was kind of a miracle.

Vision. The gift of sight. It is something we take for granted every day. It is a beautiful gift and the centerpiece for today's readings. The book of Samuel says, “not as man sees does God sees”. When Samuel arrives to pick a son of Jesse to be king, it was the overlooked son David that God chooses to be king. Saint Paul tells us in Ephesians, “You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light...” And notice how the Gospel story begins! The disciples ask Jesus, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Now notice how sinners operate! Instead of having compassion on the man born blind, they want to assign blame so that they can have the comfort of believing they can avoid this infirmity.

Jesus does not offer them this comfort, “Neither he nor his parents sinned; it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him.” The disciples begin the story blind and they don’t even know it. Jesus is asking them to see God’s glory and love shine through infirmity. People with a physical disability ought to be treated with the same love and respect as anyone else. Jesus makes that very clear when he restores sight to the man born blind.

Indeed, after Jesus gives sight to the man born blind, we see that Jesus’ gift of sight isn’t limited to the man’s eyes. The man also gains spiritual sight that grows as the story progresses. He begins by referring to his healer as “the man called Jesus”. His spiritual sight progresses when he refers to Jesus as “a prophet”. At the end of the story, his spiritual sight becomes crystal clear when he confesses Jesus to be “Lord”, a title reserved only for the Deity.

Meanwhile, as the man born blind grows in spiritual sight, notice how the religious leaders in the story become progressively spiritually blind. They do not take the man for his word, they bring in the man’s parents for questioning, and they can’t get past their bias that Jesus is, in their eyes, a sinner. The drama heats up as our hero’s spiritual sight becomes restored to the point where he becomes an evangelist. Just like the woman at the well last week, the story begins with this man alone and in isolation. After an encounter with the Lord, the man becomes an evangelist. The religious leaders, refusing to see the amazing grace at work in this man’s life, shut their eyes to the miracle that has taken place, denounced the man as a sinner, and threw him out of the synagogue. By the end of the story, an ironic reversal of fortune has taken place. The blind man sees and those who claim to see are actually spiritually blind.

My friends, who are we in the story? Who are we in the story? I would like to suggest that we are all, every one of us, the man born blind. The sight that is given to us at birth isn’t sufficient for seeing God. We need a different sight for that, the sight that comes from faith. Now, all of us have received a special gift of spiritual sight in baptism. Just as Jesus sent the man born blind to the waters of Siloam, we were sent to the waters of baptism and the font of Sacred Scripture. We are all now challenged to see the world differently because of that amazing grace. And what would happen if we saw the world around us with Jesus’ eyes?

Would we look at our family members differently if we saw them with Jesus’ eyes? Think about it! Would we look at our co-workers or classmates differently if we saw them with Jesus’ eyes? Look! Would we see world differently if we saw these things through Jesus’ eyes? My friends, would you look at the person in the mirror differently if you saw yourself with Jesus’ eyes?

You see my friends, when we look at the mirror each morning, we can be so judgmental of what we see and we can be so myopic about how God sees our lives and the people in our lives. We can live so long like that, we can simply think our blindness is normal. What if you looked inside your heart and saw the beauty that God sees? Can you accept the invitation to see your life with a different sight like what an unnamed man saw in the waters of Siloam or what a third grade boy experienced standing on a river bank with his new pair of glasses?

Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me, I once was lost but now I’m found, I was blind, but now I see.