

22nd March 2020 (4th Sunday in Lent, Year A)

1 Samuel 16:1,6-7,10-13; Psalm 22(23); Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41.

'I am the light of the world.'

Jesus is our light; he is the light of the world! Last week Jesus promised the Samaritan woman to give her living water, water that will quench her eternal thirst. Today Jesus reminds his disciples that he has come to shine a new light on our world. He himself is this new light that shines amongst us. What is very interesting in today's gospel passage is that we notice people reacting very differently to this Light. While some approach the light with gratitude in their hearts, others are scared of its brightness, and run away, hiding from its rays! Where do I stand in relation to Jesus my light?

At the beginning of the passage, the disciples ask Jesus a very relevant question: 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, for him to have been born blind?' This was the common belief among the Jewish people at the time of Jesus. Physical disabilities and ailments are all the direct result of our sin or the sin of our parents. In this case, since the man was born blind, it could not be his sin that caused his disability, so the guilt falls on his parents. Jesus answers this question very clearly and very definitively: 'this man's blindness is not in any way related to his or his parents' sinfulness or holiness. God is not a policeman, hiding around the corner, waiting to catch you in a mistake, to punish you! Instead God is a merciful and loving God, waiting for you to sin, to give him the opportunity of showing off his mercy and forgiveness!

Moreover, Jesus continues by saying that this man was born blind "... so that the works of God might be displayed in him!" This argument barely seems fair, and is certainly meant to be taken as an allegory. This man was not born blind in order for God to have someone to heal and therefore show his glory. Rather, through the healing of this man's blindness, God's works can be displayed. Yet, unfortunately, even when we experience God's healing hand at work in our midst, at times, instead of praising God and running towards the light, some tend to run away from God's light!

This gospel story could not have come at a better time for us to reflect upon. Is our new friend, Mr Corona Virus among us as a punishment from God? Certainly not! If COVID-19 was a punishment from God, then God would be a very unjust God indeed! Viruses, bacteria, illnesses and nature do not know how to distinguish between people who are living a good life, and those who are not. I think it would be fair to presume that not everyone who has been infected with the virus is a bad person. Moreover, this pandemic has affected everyone, so even if you are not sick, and therefore presumably holy, you are still suffering from the effects of this illness; would that be fair? There are good people, doctors and nurses who have been infected while looking after the sick, surely, looking after the sick is something good and does not deserve punishment!

This points us to the second question: if it is not a punishment, but for God's glory, how can blindness, in the case of the gospel, and a highly contagious illness, in our case today, be to God's glory? Do we expect Jesus to appear, wave his hand around and heal us all, as suddenly as he healed the blind man? Certainly not. Moments of difficulty, as we are living through right now, make us stop and reflect on our relationship with God. Many of us turn to God for an answer to the happenings around us. As we continue with our celebration of Lent, we realise that God did not come to remove pain and suffering from our midst, but to show us how to live through our sufferings. Jesus, God, became human in poverty; in a simple stable, and laid down in a manger. During his life he had to suffer persecution from the leaders of his own people. Because he stood up for the truth, he was crucified. Could he have run away from the cross? He was able to calm the storm on the sea, he walked on water, he fed five thousand people, could he have struck down the soldiers who were taking him to his crucifixion? Jesus wanted to show us how to suffer patiently.

These moments of distress also help the best come out in people. Although we cannot come together as Church, because our church buildings are closed, we are still Church together, Church never dies. You and I, we are the Church, the family of God, the people of God, the Body of Christ. At

these moments, many are going out of their way to reach out to sisters and brothers who are poorer, weaker, and who need assistance. Where is God in these moments? God is in you when you reach out to help your neighbour. God lives in you and works through you when you are kind and generous. God shines through us at these moments.

At our baptism we were given a burning candle and we were told that this was the light of Christ, a symbol of our faith in Christ, and we are encouraged to keep this flame burning throughout our lives. We are the light of Christ that shines and throws light on those around us. God lives and works through us.

Unfortunately, in moments like these, some people, instead of shining out God's light, they deny the light and refuse to see it, like the Pharisees who refused to acknowledge the light. Let us pray for those whose suffering stops them from participating in the light and the life of God.

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