

**Fourth Sunday of Lent**

**March 19, 2023**

Have you ever found yourself in an argument in which you were taking a side you didn't necessarily agree with? I have, though not too often, but it does happen to me from time to time. Sometimes I am completely aware of it during the argument itself. But sometimes I don't even realize it until much later when I'm reflecting on what was said by each party. Did I really say that? Did I really take that side? Did I unintentionally play a kind of devil's advocate, that is, was I trying to persuade and convince someone of something I am not convinced of?

Why in the world did I do that? That's often not an easy question to answer. Was it because I felt the other person was being too overconfident? Was it because I was in a bad mood and was looking for a fight? Was it because I was afraid of somehow being labeled in an unfair way, not wanting to have my true position to be misunderstood? Or was the reason the most obvious and petty one, that I simply did not really like the other person, did not really respect them and therefore, did not want to be in "agreement" with them?

**"They answered and said to him, 'You were born totally in sin,  
and are you trying to teach us?'  
Then they threw him out."**

So say the Pharisees to the man in our Gospel Reading after a long interrogation. We know the story well. A man who had been blind from birth is healed by Jesus. For the very first time in his life he is able to see. And some people seem to have a big problem with it. Some went to his parents to try to get the "real story". Others, (the religious authorities) questioned him over and over and over again. They were like a dog with a bone. They simply wouldn't let it go.

Why? In one sense, they were simply doing what they did all the time, they were trying to enforce the "law", that is, they were examining the situation to see if anything "unfaithful" or "illegal" had been done. And this seemed

to be sort of a “spiritual preoccupation” with them, one that often resulted in a type of judgmental distraction, a type of narrow-focus from which they wouldn’t stray.

And in this case, it led them to ignore what was right in front of them. You think about it.

Something unbelievably wonderful had just happened. Something beautiful. Something awe-inspiring. Something completely miraculous. Yet, somehow they missed it, they didn’t get it. Somehow they dismissed it. Somehow they ignored it. Instead, they started finding fault with something that was clearly good, something that was clearly incredible, something that clearly deserved to be affirmed and shouted from the rooftops.

It’s no surprise that today’s readings are all about “sight”. That’s pretty obvious. And the implication is that we are all blind in one way or another. Another RCIA material. And what God deeply wants for us is to help us see, to open our eyes. Sometimes we don’t see correctly because we’ve been taught not to, hard-wired by others not to, and so some of us go through life looking at others through the blind eyes of prejudice and bigotry and hatred. And if or when sight finally comes to us through our humble faith and the grace of God, it is as if we are seeing for the first time.

Other times we don’t really see correctly, don’t see things in sharp focus, because we are looking through lenses with the wrong prescription. And so we often find it hard to look at others and truly see the beautiful person God created.

Rather, we see something else. It’s as if we think we know through whom God will act, whom God has found favor with (that is, the people who fit our preconceived notions of what a faithful, holy, good person looks like). That also means we can’t always see the value and potential and beauty of others. That’s not unlike what we heard in today’s First Reading from

the First Book of Samuel. The youngest son of Jesse, the most immature, the least experienced, the least likely, is the one God (through Samuel) chooses to be king. And it's still that way today.

And so when we see someone we don't like, God sees someone else. When we see a drug addict, God sees someone else. When we see a criminal, God sees someone else. When we see an unbeliever, God sees someone else. When we see someone who is selfish or arrogant or untrustworthy, God sees someone else.

Both of those examples above describe ways in which we CAN'T always see properly, CAN'T see clearly. But there is another kind of blindness. I have it at times. The Pharisees often had it. And maybe you have it too. This is the kind of blindness that comes with REFUSING to see. It sounds crazy, but we do it more often than we think.

And what happens when we have this kind of blindness is that we sometimes will find ourselves refusing to affirm the good in someone else, find ourselves continually refusing to believe or accept the words, ideas, or actions of people who don't come in the package we want.

Thankfully we don't do this all the time of course. But that's the point. We pick and choose who we are with and who we are against. This is the kind of blindness that separates us from one another - one person from another, one group from another. In a certain sense, this blindness is CHOSEN. It is spiritual stubbornness (for lack of a better word), and nothing good ever comes from it.

It can happen in our workplaces. The boss changes some office procedures and we immediately start complaining about it (even though we might think the changes are worth making).

It can happen in our families. Everything our parents do or say is "stupid", and everything our kids do or say we disagree with because "the younger generation really doesn't know anything."

It can happen in matters of faith. We're not really interested in what people of other faiths have to say. After all, what do they know? We have the "truth" and they don't.

And it happens in our politics ALL THE TIME . . . . If someone from an opposing political party (from the one that normally gets our vote) says something or does something or proposes something, we must immediately be opposed to it, immediately find fault with it, regardless of whether or not we agree with it. That doesn't matter. We simply dig in our heels, and adopt a siege mentality. I'm not budging! (No matter how much sense you make or how logical your argument is!)

My friends, a truly faithful person is someone who can see the good and affirm it wherever he or she finds it. In other words, we need to be able to say to others (and sincerely mean it) . . . .

That's a really good idea.

I never thought of it that way.

You made a good point.

I understand where you're coming from.

I have to think about this some more.

It's not for me to judge.

You have my support.

We might disagree, but I appreciate your point of view and your honesty.

That's an interesting way of looking at it.

I wish I could feel the way you do.

I know I don't have all the answers.

How do you see it?

Does what I'm saying make sense, or is there something I'm missing?

I really enjoyed our conversation. I'm better for it.

Can we be that way? Can we see the good right in front of us, the good in the opinions of others, the good in the ideas of others, the good in the actions of others? That is, can we see God at work and alive in others?

Or will we continue to always take an "us vs. them" mentality, always divide the world into separate groups and factions and ideologies? Will we be just like the Pharisees in today's Gospel, so worried about being "right" or worried about remaining stubbornly entrenched in and identified with a particular group, that we miss the beautiful, wonderful action of God happening right in front of us?

Or can we find a way to see each and every person for who they are; a child of God and an opportunity to encounter God's grace?

Put simply, will we be open to seeing precisely what God wants us to see?