

Fourth Sunday of Lent--"A" Cycle 2020--St. Leonard, 10:30

1 Samuel 16:1, 6-7, 10-13; Psalm 23:1-3,3-4,5-6; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41

I. Introduction

- A. In his reflection for this Sunday, Fr. Ron Rolheiser relates this experience: "I remember an Easter Sunday some years ago when I was a young graduate student in San Francisco. Easter Sunday was late that year and it was a spectacularly beautiful spring day. But on that particular day I was mostly blind to what was around me. I was young, homesick, alone on Easter Sunday, and nursing a huge heartache, which colored everything I was seeing and feeling. Easter Sunday in spring, in high sunshine, but, for what I was seeing, it might as well have been midnight on Good Friday, in the dead of winter. Lonely and nursing a heartache, I took a walk to calm my restlessness. At the entrance of a park, I saw a blind beggar holding a sign that read: it's spring and I'm blind! The irony wasn't lost on me. I was blind that day, more blind than that beggar, seeing neither spring nor the resurrection. What I was seeing were only those things that reflected what was going on inside my own heart."
(liturgy.slu.edu, March 22, 2020)
- B. What struck me most about his story came at the end: "What I was seeing were only those things that reflected what was going on inside my own heart." Isn't that so often the case for us, too? It's the blindness of our hearts, not of our eyes, that prevents most of us from seeing as God sees. And as God tells Samuel in our first reading: "Not as man sees does God see, because man sees the appearance but the Lord looks into the heart."

II. Learning to See

- A. Pope Francis spoke in a similar vein six years ago: "The path of the blind man ... is a gradual process that begins with knowing Jesus' name. He does not know anything else about him. In fact, he says: "The man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes" (Jn 9:11). In response to the pressing questions of the doctors of the law he first says that Jesus is a prophet (Jn 9:17)) and then a man close to God (Jn 9:31). After he is thrown out of the Temple, excluded from society, Jesus finds him again and "opens his eyes" a second time, revealing to him his true identity: "I am the Messiah," he tells him. At this point, the man who was blind exclaims: "I believe, Lord!" (Jn 9:38), and prostrates himself before Jesus. This is a passage of the Gospel that gives us a glimpse of the drama of the interior blindness of many people. And we glimpse our own interior blindness too because we sometimes have moments of such blindness."
(http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus/2014/documents/papa-francesco_angelus_20140330.html)
- B. We all suffer from spiritual blindness—in various ways and degrees, but none of us sees clearly as God sees. And as God tells Samuel in our first reading: "Not as man sees does God see, because man sees the appearance but the Lord looks into the heart." As Pope Francis points out, the blind man in today's gospel only learned gradually to see clearly who Jesus was, to see as God sees. And it's the same with us. We have to learn to see.
- C. You may know the words of the fox to the Little Prince in St. Exupery's wonderful little book: "It is only with the heart that one can see rightly, what is essential is invisible to the eye." It is our hearts that need to learn how to see.

- D. That may help us understand the words of Jesus near the end of today's gospel: "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you are saying, 'We see,' so your sin remains." Their eyesight was fine; their blindness was heart blindness.
- E. Gerald Darring gives just a few examples of heart blindness in our time: "We look at poor people and see nothing other than rundown houses and littered streets. We look at the homeless and see nothing other than dirty faces and ragged clothes. We look at people who are different from us and we see nothing other than the color of their skin or the way they manipulate their bodily limbs." (liturgy.slu.edu, March 22, 2020) You can probably add other examples without thinking too long.

III. Enlightenment

- A. You probably remember that Lent developed from the catechumenate. These forty days are the retreat before baptism, and it is called the Period of Purification and Enlightenment. In the early church, Baptism was sometimes called "Illumination." Those preparing for Baptism need to learn how to see as God sees, how to see with the heart of Christ, illuminated by the Holy Spirit.
- B. If we really embrace our Baptism, that means we learn to see everything in a different light. We see people differently. We see issues differently. We see creation differently.
- C. That's much of what conversion means—a change of mind and heart. All of us are shaped by our society and the way it sees things. More often than not, this is **not** the way God sees things. We need to constantly challenge ourselves on what criteria we are judging issues and people and situations—by society's standards or by God's.

IV. Conclusion

- A. Learning to see as God sees takes time—often a lifetime. Lent calls us each year to examine our vision—the way our hearts see and respond to the people and the world around us.
- B. And the more we learn to do that, the more we will become a light for others, helping them to see as God sees. St. Paul says, "You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light, for light produces every kind of goodness and righteousness and truth." That is our calling: to be light!
- C. At your baptism, you or your parents were given a baptismal candle as a reminder of that calling. The words accompanying that ritual in the Baptism of Children ask that "your child, enlightened by Christ, may walk always as a child of the light."
- D. Perhaps we need to imagine ourselves carrying that candle with us throughout every day so that we remember that we are to be light and live as children of light. And let us pray often: "Lord, teach us to see!"

