

The 4th Sunday of Lent

'You were darkness once, but now you are light in the Lord; be like children of the light, for the effects of the light are seen in complete goodness in right living and truth.'

Last Thursday I celebrated Mass with one of the classes at St. Peter's School. The Gospel we considered was the one that we have just heard, the Gospel of the Man born Blind. When we talked about the complaining Pharisees, who were annoyed because Jesus healed the man on the Sabbath, the children were both amazed and shocked. How could anyone possibly complain because Jesus gave the man sight which he had never had? Did he really matter when he did it, Sabbath or not?

I explained that the Pharisees were upset because to heal a man on the Sabbath was for Jesus to put himself in place of God. Nevertheless, the children had little difficulty in understanding Jesus when he says at the end of the Gospel that those without sight may see and those with sight turn blind. The Pharisees were blind. Yes, they could see but they were blind to his reality and identity as God. The blind man could not only see him as a physical person but also as God. That is why, towards the end of the Gospel, he professes his faith in Jesus and worships him.

Samuel was surprised when it turned out that God wanted him to anoint David as the first and new King of Israel. As we heard described so beautifully, he was not even considered seriously by his Father Jesse. Those who usually made those decisions had no power against God who had chosen David because he knew what was within him. He had the potential within him for what God intended.

The same was true of the man born blind, who was dismissed by the Pharisees as a sinner through and through. Yet he was chosen by God to be given new sight. Both new physical sight and spiritual sight. God knew that the blind man was open to the gift of sight and that he would see Jesus as both human and divine. The Pharisees could only see him as human.

None of us knows what is really within us, only God does and because he knows he has chosen us to follow him, to be his disciples, to witness to his presence and action in the world so that the works of God might be displayed in us as happened in the case of the blind man.

Yes, the man was born blind so that the works of God might be seen in him. Baptism, confirmation and our weekly eating and drinking of the risen Lord's Body and Blood, means that we were born and chosen for the same thing. Crucial to our mission is that we are able to see with the eyes of faith, which means seeing Jesus for who he is and seeing him present and active in our lives; our relationships; our world and creation.

So how do we ensure that we are moving from darkness into light. How do we open our eyes to the real light which Christ is? He is, after all, the light of the world, and his light leads us to truth, freedom and flourishing.

The starting point is to acknowledge that we are moving from darkness to light, as St. Paul puts it. And the painful part is to acknowledge with regret and sorrow that we often prefer darkness. How can that possibly happen? Whenever our vision, preference, or decision is influenced or shaped by envy, greed, power, the acquisition of possessions or pleasure, without regard for the finer values of poverty, respect, acceptance and thanksgiving for others and their gifts, the darkness of sin clings too easily. Then it is time for repentance and a change of heart. The forgiveness of God is the greatest healing power bringing human transformation and renewal and all we need do is seek God's forgiveness and celebrate it in the Sacrament of Penance, Confession or Reconciliation. There are many opportunities for this during Lent.

It is that experience of the healing power of God's forgiveness that will gradually clarify our spiritual vision. I don't mean that we will start having visions – though that is not impossible. More likely it will mean that our lives are more widely and deeply open to prayer and trust and to living in tune with the Word of Life who is Jesus himself. In turn we will be able to glimpse the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in more and more moments of life, in our relationships as they move to greater unity and community, guiding, healing and making connections that we would not have thought possible.