

***"It is All About Seeing"***

Today's Holy Gospel is all about "seeing." Have you ever walked into a room that was totally dark? I guess you might call it pitch black! You cannot see a thing and it takes a while for your eyes to adjust – for your pupils to open wider and let more of whatever light there is in. If you wake up in the middle of the night in a hotel room and need to visit the rest room – the light creeping in under the door from the hallway is a very welcomed guest – right? Darkness is the absence of light – and when light is allowed into the equation you can see so much more and your comfort level rises considerably. Have you ever heard someone tell you they were afraid of the light? I don't think there is any youngster who has said 'Mommy, Daddy I am afraid of the light!' Instead many will say 'I am afraid of the dark!' Having light in a darkened situation – no matter how small that light is – reveals a safe path, showing us obstacles to avoid and allows us to function somewhat reasonably.

When Jesus was asked by the Pharisees who was responsible for the blindness of the man in today's Gospel – He simply responded "*Neither this man nor his parents sinned,*" said Jesus, "*but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.*" (John 9:3-5) Jesus was referring to the lack of light in this man's life to demonstrate that when light is introduced – there is a complete and total change – a transformation. Jesus states emphatically that He is that light!

This is not the first time that Jesus referred to light. In John chapter 8, Jesus tells that woman who was caught in adultery to "*Go now and leave your life of sin.*" and then Jesus told the Pharisees "*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*" (John 8:12) This woman was living in sin, in the darkness of separation from God – and Jesus lovingly told her that He did not condemn her – but that her behavior needed an "extreme makeover!" He told her true – that God loves her – no matter what. He told her she needed to turn away from that behavior. We may have heard it in a different way, a different translation: "*Jesus said 'Go and sin no more!'*"

Speaking of needing an extreme makeover – what about the Pharisees and the blind man? There is a lot going on with them in today's Gospel –

- A man who has been blind since birth gets to see for the very first time.
- The Pharisees, who are about to accuse Jesus of healing on the Sabbath – first go after the blind man, his parents, and anyone else who they can pin his blindness on – as a sinner.
- Jesus proclaims that He is the Light of the World.
- They can't find a sinner to blame so they call Jesus a sinner!
- The Pharisees don't want to hear the good things that the formerly blind man has to say about Jesus – and they throw him out!

- In response to Jesus' question if the man believes in the Son of Man – the formerly blind man says *"Who is he, Lord, that I might believe in him?"*
- Jesus responds plainly, certainly and firmly *"You have both seen Him, and He is the one who is talking with you."*

Don't you find it ironic that a man who was born unable to see is the one who sees more clearly than the Pharisees? Let me put it to you this way – this man was born in darkness – not sin, but real permanent darkness. I don't think any of us can even imagine what it must be like to no longer be able to see at all. Then Jesus explained that this man was born that way so that God could use him to display His mercy and His love – and His eternal healing power over spiritual blindness.

In my opinion – the real sin is spiritual blindness, not physical blindness. Jesus has given sight to a man born physically blind, but this is a sign of the more significant spiritual light that Jesus provides for those who are spiritually blind and unless we let Him open the eyes of our heart – as a real coming to faith – the darkness reigns. (I wish Marilyn, my wife was here – she is teaching Children's Church over in the Parish Hall, she would probably be thinking of that modern hymn "Open the eyes of my heart Lord open the eyes of my heart – I want to see you!") The Apostle Paul prays for the Ephesians in their struggle against spiritual blindness: *"I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe."* (Ephesians 1:18-19)

Through Jesus' healing of the man's eyes – we see the One who created everything – with just a word. *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and empty, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. God saw that the light was good"* (Genesis 1:1-4)

In the very beginning of John's Gospel – we look at the creation story through different eyes – remember I told you it was all about seeing? Listen to these words and see what your heart tells you. *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, **and that life was the Light of men.** The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not understood it. There came a man who was sent from God, His name was John. He came as a witness, to testify concerning the Light, so that through him all might believe. **He himself was not the Light, he came only as a witness to the Light. The true Light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.** He was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognize Him. He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him."* (John 1:1-11)

#### Fourth Sunday in Lent – March 26, 2017, Year A

Here was the long awaited Messiah standing right in front of the leaders of the Temple and they didn't have the eyes to see Him, to recognize Him, but instead, they were more concerned with a man being healed on the Sabbath and the legalistic breaking of the Law. Jesus, the Light of the World, was right in front of them waiting for them to get it – but as a friend of mine who is the manager of the Pittsburgh Pirates once said: “these guys couldn't hit water if they fell out of a boat!” I will attribute that to Clint Hurdle. It is true – it is right in front of them! Jesus tries to give them a huge hint – by telling them that He is the light that can make them see – after all light reveals the truth that is right in front of you – doesn't it?

There are a lot of people who might be afraid of what the light would reveal in their lives. In fact Jesus told Nicodemus that very same thing – right after He told him about God sending His Son so that whoever believed in Him would have eternal life. Jesus told him: *"This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."* (John 3:19-21) Those are the words that come right after the famous John 3:16, and people stop at verse 16, never going to 17 and 1 revealing the truth – and Jesus sheds more light all the way through verse 21.

I am afraid that people are so afraid of the punishment for their deeds and the threat that others might find out what they have done – that they don't remember God's promise of salvation and forgiveness of sins – through the cross – through belief in the One who came to take their guilt and shame away along with the sin. Let Jesus, replace the darkness and sin in your heart with the light of His love. Remember this - darkness cannot exist in the light – it is a physical impossibility! Give it to Him today – let Jesus take your sadness, your fear, your pain – your worry, your depression – along with your guilt and shame. Let Jesus fill you with His light!

I must ask you this question: How strong is your relationship with Jesus – how clearly do you see the light of His love in your life?

- Is it like a pencil flashlight that you can see but just barely; you love Him – but you really don't trust Him enough to give Him your sins?
- Or is it like a medium sized flashlight that shines pretty nicely – but it only goes so far? You give Him some – but not all.
- Is the Light of Jesus a bright shining beacon that others can see – and it gets brighter and brighter the more you trust in Him, out your faith in Him, confide in Him and repent to Him?

This is a message that we all need to hear. I have said it before – we are all walking around with something bothering us; something weighing us down, something that Satan loves to remind us about, even though we have gone to Jesus and asked for forgiveness. We need to go to Jesus and ask Him to take away the shame and the guilt, only You can do that and free me from this. We need a reminder, and that is what Lent is about – so that when Jesus rises and we remember that on Easter Sunday, we can be free. There's a reason why we have a confession

and absolution before we receive Communion - so that we can be free to worship together, to be free together and enjoy the gift that Jesus gave us – by going to the cross.

Jesus invites you and encourages you today, to see Him as the Light. He encourages you to put away spiritual blindness and like the blind man –to truly see Jesus for who He is.

A unique and very personal part of ministry is being with people as their vision becomes more clear – as they see God working in their life. It's all about seeing; seeing and recognizing Jesus – the Light of the World.