

Homily for the 4th Sunday of Lent

March 21-22, 2020

Readings: 1 Samuel 16: 1B, 6-7, 10-13A; Ephesians 5: 8-14; John 9: 1-41

Preacher: Gloria Ulterino

My husband and I are new to Netflix. So just recently we binged on all the episodes thus far of the “The Crown,” a story of the British monarchy in the 20th century. The acting is great. Believable. The historical context of each segment helps set the stage. I kept saying, “Ah, yes, I remember” (at least for the second half of the century!).

But here’s my biggest take-away: it had been so easy for me to make judgments. “She’s too stuffy. He’s too rigid.” Until ... I began to see the humanity of each one: their struggles, their strengths, their weaknesses. Why, they’re just like us! I couldn’t help thinking: if only we could see as God sees. If only we could see into the truest truth of each person. And then: Act on what we see. What a change that might make in our world!

It’s always been tough for us humans to see as God sees. Take Samuel, for example. You may recall that Samuel, the last and possibly the greatest of Israel’s Judges, was commanded by God to select a new king. Saul, the first king, had disappointed God. Now David was to be the king. As you might imagine, Samuel shook in his boots. “What? Send me? To name a new king? When Saul still has power?” Yes, insists God. So, off he went, to Jesse of Bethlehem, for it was one of Jesse’s sons who would be king. Nope, not the first, though he was handsome in appearance. Nor the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, or even the 7th. Are there any others? Yes, just David, but he’s out in the fields, tending the sheep. “There! Anoint him! He’s the one!”

It’s tough to see as God sees ... and act on it. Right? At this point, recent events have pointed me in a slightly different direction than I had originally anticipated. Oh, the details still proceed from the Gospel passage: Jesus’ healing of the man born blind. But my bottom line is now this: the *courage* it takes to really see as God sees ... with insight, heart-sight ... and then to act upon it. Little by little, bit by bit. Without fear. Without panic.

This Lent is different. We are being attacked by an invisible enemy, the coronavirus. And the human instinct, it appears, is to succumb to panic. But it's still Lent. Folks are still preparing for Baptism. How urgent it is then, today, for us to see that we are *all* the "man born blind." We are *all* sent by Jesus to "wash in the pool of Siloam." (For Siloam means "the One Who Is Sent.") To go, to wash, and then to act upon what we see. With courage.

John's story, in all its details, offers us that hope and courage in these troubled times. The hope and courage given to the man born blind. And to *us*. Unable to see, at first, who Jesus truly is. The Son of the very God who created humankind out of the clay of the earth. Each of us, a new creation, from the very beginning.

Then, like the man, we can grow into God-sight, heart-sight, and ultimately into the *courage* to act upon what we know to be true. Yes, we've all been immersed in the pool of Siloam. But fear growls at our door, just as it did for him and those around him. Only the man born blind seems to have deeply contended with his fear, as we all must do. Having stared down hardened religious leaders, he grows in heart-sight, insight, and naming this healer with ever deepening truths. Jesus is a prophet ... a man "from God," for only such a one could heal in such a way ... the Son of Man (John's name for Jesus as Savior) ... and finally, Lord. Courage now propels his words into actions, "Yes, Lord, I believe ... I worship You."

So it is, in this season Lenten season of the coronavirus, that we must all come face to face with our own fears, whatever they might be. Take precautions, yes, absolutely. But stay connected to our communities in whatever ways we can (with cell phones, skype, with all the modern technology at our fingertips).

For the deepest reality is that we are already connected, in Christ, who is within and among us, in ways well beyond our vision and understanding. Therefore, "visit" the sick, however we can. Support and advocate for any group in serious need by letters, emails, petitions, whatever we can do. Like those in Florida, who advocate for the return of voting rights to all who have served their time in prison and been released. These works of God do not cease, even and especially in the midst of the coronavirus. Even and especially in times of fear and panic. In short, remember: we have been baptized into Jesus the Christ, The Hope and Courage of God Personified. And then world, watch out: for we *can* bring the transformation of Jesus into this world of ours.