

Homily for March 25, 2001
4th Sunday of Lent Cycle A (RCIA Option)

By Father Charles Bowes

1 Samuel 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a
Ephesians 5:8-14
John 9:1-41

When we come out of the waters of baptism, when we renew our baptismal promises, we see things differently.

Lent is not just about penance - it's also about baptism...about renewing our promises made in baptism and for some of us, becoming baptized or received into Full Communion. In other words, our penance has a purpose: to get us ready to get wet at Easter - to be touched and to touch the water made holy by those baptized and again to come to see God in Jesus.

That's what happened to the man born blind in our gospel of John - he came to see with his heart, with the eyes of faith, that Jesus was the Messiah. While others could not let go of what they literally saw - that Jesus broke the Sabbath law - and so could *not* see with the eyes of faith, with their hearts.

Our preoccupation with naming our sinfulness can get in the way of seeing Jesus as our way to God. You see, Saint John's gospel offers a new definition of sin. According to Saint John, sin is not about what we do, but about how we relate to God. The disciples in John, chapter 9, assume that some immoral act caused this man to be born blind. Jesus, however, responds by healing him, and that act takes all judgments of this

kind out of human hands: neither the religious authorities of the synagogue nor the early Christians, the first readers of the gospel, can judge another's sin - each person stands before God, relates to God. The sin of the world is this judgment we are so prone to make... and Jesus takes away the sin of the world - Jesus lets each human being stand before God, stand before the light and the love of God and so redefines our relationship with God. Salvation from sin in Saint John's gospel is primarily a result of Jesus' life, not his death, because it is the very life of Jesus as God's son and Incarnate Word that makes it possible for people to move from sin to eternal life. To see Jesus with the eyes of faith is to have eternal life.

But it's hard for us to buy into this - because it's easier to have a list of sinful acts that we can name - lust and pride and lying and stealing and on and on. It's much harder to ask the question of what is our relationship to God in Jesus. That's how come it was so much easier for the folks in John's gospel to ask the question of how Jesus broke the law - which he did - he made paste on a Sunday and smeared it on somebody's eyes - folks just couldn't see beyond the deed - they couldn't see Jesus with the eyes of faith.

This pool at Easter time will be filled with water - it's just ordinary water - but once touched by those

baptized becomes the bearer of the life of Jesus glorified. We then will wet ourselves from this water throughout the season and especially at Easter. It takes the eyes of faith to see this water as transformed.

At the Easter Vigil we will go in procession from the place in which we tell our story – from the Community Center to here, and we will surround the folks to be baptized. We are not here to see them be baptized – we are here to be in solidarity with them, to protect them, to make them feel safe. Speaking as one who has to get in this water and get mighty wet in the process, I can tell you I feel quite vulnerable and it is of immense comfort to feel surrounded by folks of faith. Which is what the people being baptized feel, too – surrounded, protected, supported by our faith. We will not all be able to see the baptism because our work at that point in the liturgy is not to see but to support, not to watch but to pray for, not to observe but to be part of the Body of Christ enveloping, surrounding, enclosing with our faith, their faith so exposed and obvious. It's not with our physical eyes that we view the baptisms at Easter, but with the eyes of faith, the eyes of our hearts.

In the early Church, when folks were baptized they were baptized privately because of the nudity involved – deacons and deaconesses would enfold the folks in the great robes they wore and lower them into the water to be baptized and afterwards wisk them out, dry them off, and put them in new clothing. Then – then they were brought before the assembly and recognized publicly for the first time through the anointing with chrism of Confirmation. That's what we do at the vigil – folks are baptized in a protected

environment – cleaned up and then anointed publicly where we can all see that. Baptism requires seeing with the eyes of faith, the same faith required to renew our own baptismal promises.

There is a wonderful little story entitled *The Little Prince*, in which the little prince falls in love with a beautiful rose. He learns in his journey to love that “it is only with the heart that one can see rightly.” The eyes of faith bring us here to this table and to see God in Jesus.

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