

**Homily for March 26, 2006
Fourth Sunday of Lent (A)**

By Father Charles Bowes

1 Samuel 16:1, 6-7, 10-13

Psalm 23

Ephesians 5:8-14

John 9:1-41

Together with our Elect for the sacraments of Easter, we want to see honestly and without fear.

For me, the key to this story is found at its end with Jesus saying, “For judgment I came into the world, that those who do not see may see and that those who see may become blind.” The story is not about the contrast between people who are blind and those who see, but between those who know they are blind and those who claim to see.

Who in this story really suffers from blindness? The religious leaders refuse to see what is right before their eyes: a man who was blind now sees. The man's parents acknowledge the wonder of his healing, but lack the religious insight to accept this marvel as coming from God. Only the man who initially could not see possesses both sight and faith.

This reading could make us wonder: What keeps us in our blindness – or perhaps better said, what keeps us resistant to seeing? Even if our eyesight is ok, maybe our “heart sight” or “soul sight” is lame. This is the question our Elect for the sacraments of Easter have asked, and out of which have crafted our litany of scrutiny this week. What keeps us clinging to prejudice or judgment or sentiment? Sometimes it is because of

rigid insistence on protocol, as was the case with the Pharisees. In one sense, they are correct. Jesus did heal on the Sabbath, and according to the Law, that is not acceptable practice. Despite this apparent infraction of the law, these men are blind because they refuse to acknowledge the divine power of God working outside the structures of their religious system. They refuse to accept the freedom of God and so are blind to the marvels this can accomplish.

At other times we are blinded by fear. We are afraid we may fall out of favor if we stand up for what we believe is right, so we choose not to recognize it. We opt to live our own lives quietly and safely and not get involved in controversial matters. When we act in this way, we blind ourselves to the wonders unfolding before our very eyes.

Or we could choose to stay blind from stereotyping others. We might think that these others are too young or too old. They might not be the right gender or race or from the right ethnic background. They might lack power or importance or economic status. The prophet Samuel sought a king for Israel from among the sons of Jesse, but he considered only those of “lofty stature.” He never even entertained the possibility of Jesse's youngest son, David. Yet this was the one whom God had singled out. So often we too are

blind to the potential of others because they do not meet our expectations. We close our eyes to what they might become or what they might accomplish.

St. John of the Cross, one of the great doctors and mystics of the Church, tells us in his writings that “when God looks, God loves.” In other words, God is not dissuaded or discouraged or put off by our blindness: not even by blindness deliberately chosen. God is not embarrassed by the weaknesses and sins that embarrass us. God does not love us any more if we do good or any the less if we do bad. God isn't moody. When God looks, God loves. It is this divine gaze that can transform our lives and make us into new beings: people who can own our blindness and even risk still more insight as to what that blindness is. Do we have faith enough to believe God looks so lovingly? Yet we are to have faith that this is indeed a fact.

Together with the Elect for the sacraments of Easter, we are called in this Lenten period of purification and enlightenment to make a choice. Will we choose light and all the responsibilities that accompany it? Or will we remain in the darkness of our narrow-mindedness, our insulated lives and our biases? As always, God is eager to restore us to sight. God always looks, and God always loves. Are we ready to get up and wash in the waters so that we may see?

Let us pray: Show us our blindness, healing God; may we never say, “I see” falsely. Make us trustworthy guides to those who seek you and who hear our words along the way. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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