

Homily for the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent  
March 31, 2019  
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Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons are great at house to house evangelization. Most of us dread them coming to the door because we feel inadequate when it comes to defending our faith. We sometimes treat them rudely because we see their visits as a nuisance rather than as a reminder that perhaps we need to know more about our faith. We are blinded by our inadequacy and miss an opportunity to evangelize.

I remember this man, a Jehovah's Witness, who every morning used to stand downtown on the corner of Preston and Main and preach at the top of his lungs. He was blind. He always began by lifting up his red-edged Bible and shouting, "I was blind but now I see." This way he would attract a group of curious people around him and begin witnessing to them. His courage, and standing on a corner defending your faith takes a lot of courage, was an absolute testimony to the distinction between physical and spiritual blindness. Physically he was blind, but spiritually he was clear sighted, or at least so he believed.

Today's gospel centers on the analogy and distinction between physical and spiritual blindness. Early Christians saw physical blindness as a metaphor for the spiritual blindness which prevents people from recognizing and coming to Jesus. This Gospel story testifies, therefore,

to the power of Jesus to heal not just the blindness of the eye but, above all, the blindness of the heart.

The clue that the evangelist intended this story to be read on these two levels, physical and spiritual, is found at the end of the story: **Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see might see, and those who do see might become blind." Some of the Pharisees, who were with him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now you are saying, 'We see,' so your sin remains."** (John 9:39-41)

The mission statement that Jesus gives here is valid not only for the Pharisees but for all of us in our time. To learn from Jesus we must first admit our ignorance, to be healed we must first acknowledge our blindness, to be forgiven we must first confess our sins. We have to let God be in charge.

The Pharisees believed that having possessions and living the good life were blessings from God for following the letter of the law; while having no possessions and being in need were punishments for having broken the law. This logic made it acceptable for them to take advantage of those in need by using the law in order to maintain their status in society. The law for instance gave them the power to dictate

when a person could and could not be healed. For them the law became God.

This pharisaical theory is not far from the relativist mentality so prevalent today which falsely theorizes that each of us as individuals decides what's right and wrong for ourselves. This theory when applied to all of society creates moral chaos. It eliminates absolute truth and moral law and therefore sin. The great archbishop Fulton J. Sheen who was often ahead of his time used to say that, "in the past only Catholics believed in the Immaculate Conception but today everybody thinks they are immaculately conceived and, therefore, sinless." Today the individual becomes God.

Paul says to us, "Awake O sleeper and arise from the dead and Christ will give you light." Everything exposed by the light becomes visible. In order to truly see God, we have to let God be God. Our common Baptism, our anointing allows the Spirit of the Lord to rush upon us. From earliest times today's gospel story has been associated with Baptism. Just as the blind man in the story went down into the waters of Siloam and came up whole, so also believers who are immersed into the waters of baptism come up spiritually whole, totally healed of the spiritual blindness with which we are born. For, like the blind man in the gospel who was born physically blind, we are all born

spiritually blind. God however opens our eyes to his presence through the community of faith.

Our Baptism, the promises of our parents, our godparents and our faith community to keep the light of Christ burning in our hearts these spell out in a very dramatic way what it takes to be a disciple of Jesus. As we mature in our faith our mission becomes, in fact, a story of how a blind man who used to sit and beg became a disciple who went about witnessing to Jesus. As in last week's story of the conversion of the Samaritan woman by Jacob's well, this story of the healing of the blind man shows that the one thing we need to qualify to bear witness to Jesus is a conversion of heart. It is a conversion of heart, an opening up to the spirit of the Lord, which awakens in us the desire to have knowledge of and defend our faith. We begin to live as children of light.

Christianity has to do first with knowing and following the Person, the person of our Lord Jesus Christ; seeing him in our hearts as our Lord and Savior. The most important thing we do as a community of faith is to bring people into a relationship with Jesus. It is only after establishing such a personal relationship with the Lord that people can begin to appreciate the importance of church worship and doctrine for the life of faith. If Baptism is turning on the light, and personal relationship is making sure the light never burns out then doctrine must

be instruction on how to change the bulb. All are necessary to the task at hand, to the mission laid out for each of us by Christ. Lack of any ingredient can one day lead to darkness.

The question is will we be ready at the next ring of our doorbell to turn on the light of Christ in the heart of a blind stranger; to say, let me introduce you to the Jesus I know? If not then how can we expect to keep the light burning in the hearts of our own children?