

4th Sunday of Lent

A friend of mine recently had a stroke that affected her eyesight. She was a real avid reader all her life and now she is unable to read. I think that we would all agree that to lose all or part of our eyesight would be a great tragedy? The scripture readings today use examples of physical eyesight to introduce us to the deeper theme of religious insight.

Take for example the first reading about the anointing of David as King of Israel. David was the youngest of eight sons and according to the customs of the time he would be the least likely of all the sons to be chosen as a king. (Those of you who are the youngest in your family can perhaps identify with David's situation.) God however, as he does so often in the scriptures, chooses David rather than one of his older brothers. We are told that God makes this choice because He doesn't judge by status or physical appearance but by what is in the human heart. God sees in this insignificant shepherd the potential of a great king. This kind of choosing by God is also found in the gospel reading where Jesus cures a blind man despite that fact that Jewish religious leaders consider the man to be a sinner.

God's choice of David and the blind man raises the question about the type of criteria that we use to judge others – and we do judge others, don't we? Do we judge others solely by their age, beauty, physical strength or social position or do we look into the heart of others as God does? Studies show, for example, that those who are judged by society as beautiful or handsome are also judged to be more intelligent than average as well. (No wonder that I did so well in college! – [just kidding])

The story of the man born blind is a paradoxical story. The blind man actually sees Jesus as God while the Jewish religious leaders who have their eye sight are blind to

Jesus' true identity. These religious leaders do not believe that he was cured by Jesus and so do not see the deep meaning of his cure. They judge by appearance, that is, they believe what their religion teaches them that the man is blind because of his own sinfulness or that of his parents. That is, they understand that the blindness is a punishment for as well as proof of his sinfulness. They refuse to believe that God would work through a sinner to reveal his power.

Those of us who belong to this community of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton can be blind as well when we judge one another by appearances and not by the human heart. For example, it is very easy for us to stereotype people, especially if we have known them most of our lives. This was my experience of growing up in a small town. People were judged as winners or losers in grade school and were treated that way the rest of their lives unless they were fortunate enough to leave town!

There is stereotyping that goes on in Catholic parishes. For example, I have had people tell me that they don't sit up front in church because they don't want to be hypocrites. In other words they believe that those who do sit up front are hypocrites. A related stereotype is that those who sit in the back choose to sit there because they want to leave mass early.

The scripture readings today leave us with two questions: First, how do we judge others? Do we judge solely by appearance or stereotype? Second, since God doesn't judge by appearance or stereotype but rather by what is in the human heart, what then is in our heart and how would God judge us?

