

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair." I'm sure you recognize these lines as what many consider the greatest opening lines in any novel written in the English language. They are, of course, the first lines of Charles Dickens' Masterpiece, *A Tale of Two Cities*. The novel contrasted the insanity of the reign of Terror following the French Revolution with the magnanimity of those who reached out beyond their own concerns to care and love for others.

Well, we are not living in a Dickens novel now, but in many ways, we are living in the best of times and worst of times. The **Coronavirus Pandemic** has disrupted life as we know it. Now, during the holiest time of the year, people are unable to go to Mass and receive the Eucharist. Babies cannot be baptized unless there is a dire emergency. Confirmation has been postponed to an unknown time. Funerals and Weddings can only be celebrated with the immediate family present. I, and you, never fathomed that this could ever happen. Schools have been suspended, and most of the daily joys of life outside our homes have been canceled, including anything to do with sports. We watch the news with dread that the virus has taken loved ones from our families or communities.

With all this said, this is also the best of times. More than ever, people are turning to God, praying for protection. All the restrictions placed on public religious gatherings are only to protect people, particularly the vulnerable, from being exposed to the virus. All of us willingly sacrifice up our own desires for the safety of others. People are looking for those who need help, shopping for the elderly, calling those on self-quarantine to let them know they are not alone. There is a great deal of love going on right now. In many ways, these difficult times have brought out so much good in people that they can also be seen as the best of times.

The people who heard or read the beautiful ninth chapter of the Gospel of John, today's long Gospel of the Man Born Blind, knew that they were also experiencing the best of times and the worst of times. The Gospel of John was not completed until the end of the first century. By then, Peter and Paul, all of the other apostles, perhaps with the exception of John himself, had all been killed, some were tortured to death. Even the pagan historian Tacitus wrote that the Christians persecuted under Nero suffered so horribly that many Romans felt a deep compassion for them. And yet, through all the terrors the people who read John had experienced or expected, there was a deep joy that though they were following Christ to death they were also joining him in eternal life. Christians supported each other, cared for each other, and, above all, held onto their faith that, as the Gospel concludes in John 20:31 "these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name." It was the worst of times, yet it was the best of times.

The subject of today's drama, the Man Born Blind, had experienced the worst of times and was continuing to experience them. He had been born blind. He had never seen his mother and father. There was nothing for him to do in the world except beg, which he did every day by the Pool of Siloam.

Perhaps, his parents brought him there every day with the hope that he might make a little to help pay their bills. Or maybe his parents had put him out of the house once he reached a certain age. Jesus healed the man. He gave him sight. Now the man was attacked by the Pharisees for daring to say that Jesus was a prophet. He was thrown out of the Temple, shunned by society. The man didn't need the Temple anymore. Nor did he need society. He had Jesus. As the drama progresses, he grows in faith until at the end he worships Jesus.

Throughout our lives we all struggle through times of darkness, grasping for light. When will the darkness of this time of pandemic be over? When will we see the light at the end of the tunnel. Well, we don't know yet when this will come to an end. But we do know this, we can already see the light. Or perhaps we are caring for a loved one who is lingering on in a slow death. Or maybe we are going from one crisis to another and wondering if we will ever see the light again. We will. We will because the light is there for us. That light is the light of the Lord. A few verses before today's Gospel, in John 8:12 Jesus called out: "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in darkness but will have the Light of life." Jesus is not just setting the scene for the drama of the Man Born Blind. He is speaking directly to us, to you and to me. He is telling us to put our trust in Him, to rest in him, and to know that no matter what happens in this world, good or bad, positive or negative, we will always enjoy the Light of Life.

We pray today for all who are suffering the effects of the Coronavirus, physical effects, and economic effects, whatever. We pray that they and all of us can recognize that Jesus provides us with the Light to guide us through the worst of times to the best of times. Let's take this rare difficult opportunity to really become the great saints God created us to be.