

## **March 22, 2020**

1 Sm 16:1b,6-7,10-13a; Eph 5:8-14; Jn 9:1-41 (LONG)

Very present in our minds these days is the current virus outbreak. Reactions seem to have ranged from dismissal of the risk to an outright terror. When things happen in the world - especially things that threaten our health and wellbeing - we can become very anxious. We hear in our readings about sight and light. In the second reading we are told *Live as children of light* [and] ... *Take no part in the fruitless works of darkness*. Through this time of uncertainty, except for a little bit of fear-driven hoarding, people seem to be acting civilly towards each other and displaying some good measure of kindness and concern - and this must continue - but living in the light also involves an internal action - one that is possible only through Jesus Christ.

In the Gospel Jesus sees a blind man, a man afflicted with an illness. What is most astonishing about this miracle is that a person born blind was seen to be beyond healing, the man himself says: *It is unheard of that anyone ever opened the eyes of a person born blind*. Jesus does what was thought to be impossible, Jesus achieves a degree of healing that was unthinkable. Jesus does this miracle for two reasons that both have relevance for us today. First, he heals a person others had no hope for. Jesus imparts a real physical healing indicating his power over the normal forces of disease and death. This should give us comfort now. A comfort to know that our God can heal physical illness. This, of course, brings up the question of why we have such illnesses at all - and why God does not heal everyone - but we'll come back to that later.

The second reason for Jesus performing this miracle was to show what he does on a spiritual level. As his healing of the man brought sight and light to the physical eyes of the man, so he brings sight and light to our spiritual eyes. The mud with the clay on the man's eyes represents the clay from which Adam was made, the human nature that blinds us to the face of Jesus standing right in front of us. The man is told to go and wash - a symbol for the Baptism that cleanses the original sin from our souls and opens our eyes to see Jesus. The man could have turned away from Jesus at that point, but instead he sees Jesus for who he is and falls and worships him. Our eyes opened by Baptism have the same ability to see clearly the realities of who Jesus is and who he can be in our lives. It takes us turning to him, and opening these eyes, to see and to enter more deeply into that life given to us in Baptism. My hope is that after this time of near quarantine, where so many are separated from the powerful presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, we will return with a deeper appreciation of the Jesus present in our assembled worship community and most powerfully and physically in the Eucharist.

This does leave us with the question I posed above. If God can heal, then why do people get sick? Why doesn't God just heal everyone? This is a question that has been on the minds of

the faithful and the atheist alike for centuries. Illnesses, like the one that is worrying us today, are an evil - and God despises evil. The whole question of why there is evil and why God allows it to occur is called the “mystery” of evil. A mystery is something we do not exactly know how to explain. So the first answer to the question of why there is evil and God does not wipe it all out is “we don’t know.” Well, you may say, that’s not a really satisfying answer! For us humans who believe that we should be able to know anything we want to, and control it - this is a difficult answer to accept. But the reality is that we have to accept not knowing the why of things all the time. There are mysteries about the workings of God that we do not understand, and there are mysteries of the universe that if you pushed a scientist they would have to honestly say “we just don’t know why.” Maybe instead we should focus on what we do know.

First as our Gospel shows us, God has the power to heal, and even to protect from evil and illness - and God does do this in some cases. Why God does not do so according to the list we provide to God is something we can’t exactly know. Secondly, God does not create evil, and God does not give people illnesses. When the disciples ask why the man was ill and wondered what he did - Jesus says it was not for anything he nor anyone else did. God selects people not to be ill but for life and greater purpose - God touches this man not to smite him for wrongdoing, but to heal. Everyone Jesus picks in the Gospels is for a good purpose, everyone he interacts with he either heals or calls to repentance and healing. In our first reading God chooses David to be king. While you could ask “Why didn’t God pick all the other brothers too? Why did he allow unpickedness to exist?” The reality was that to make everyone in the kingdom the king - doesn’t make sense. The story it is about the fact that God does select humans to have wonderful roles in his plans. It is about God giving not denying - about a God who lifts up, not tears down.

We are a community of faith that must keep connected to each other in our prayer, connected in our faith in Jesus Christ, connected in the hope that those who are faithful and follow the Lord cannot ultimately be overcome by evil and illness. At this time we can focus not on a mystery we can’t untangle, or on overly obsessing about the virus, but on the truths of a God who has the power to protect those who cooperate with that protection. We can focus on a God who does not select people for harm, but selects them for greater purpose. We were selected at our Baptism for a greater purpose that comes to us a child of God. This greater purpose extends beyond this life to the next. In the final analysis, we will all die - but God offers us in Jesus Christ a healing beyond death where we are offered an eternal life. This is a final triumph over the forces of evil. In lent we are called to turn towards the light of Christ, to see him for who he is, and to strive for union with him so that we can be with him one day in a place where there is no evil or illness or fear at all.