

The Fourth Sunday of Lent – March 21-22, 2020

I hope all of you were able to find a Mass to watch on television or listen to on radio. I do not plan to try and televise my personal Mass. I believe it is better for you to tune into a Mass at some site like a religious community where there is a community living and gathered and singing hymns and responding to the priest and more.

For my part I hope to share with you my homily thoughts on the weekends and will look into something like a podcast from myself with updates on issues in our parishes and also put that into a printed text – both of which will be available at our website.

This is surely a unique and unusual Lent not just for us but for the whole world. This 2020 Lent of the coronavirus is truly frightening and rightly so. It is an enemy that we cannot bomb away or send armies against. It is not even an enemy that we can see, but it is out there, and it is very deadly, and the best we can come up with is social distancing and prayer. The powerlessness that we are feeling and the humility that goes with it are things that we are not accustomed to in the developed world and in this 21st century. At the deepest level our pride at being in control and our self-confidence are being tested and hurt.

Many may have a hard time seeing where God is in all of this. That struggle connects well with today's readings. As Samuel and Jesse learn in today's first reading – "not as man sees does God see, for God sees into the heart." It is what God sees in David's heart that makes him God's choice to be the next king of Israel. We and the Israelites need to learn how to seek and be open to God's vision.

The same lesson is found in today's Gospel about the healing of the man born blind. There are a total of sixteen questions asked by various people in today's gospel and all of these questions express some form of limited human vision. They start with the question from Jesus' disciples about whether it was this man's sin or that of his parent's that caused him to be born blind. When something bad happens, our human vision tends to see it as punishment from God or some sin or fault on our part. Only Jesus is

able to see the deeper meaning and reason – namely, that it was not punishment but so that the glory of God might be revealed that this man was born blind.

As we see with the man, the process of coming to see with God's vision takes time. At first when he is questioned he speaks of "the man Jesus." Later he calls Jesus a "prophet." Finally, in faith he recognizes Jesus as "the Son of Man." What enables him to progress from the gift of sight to insight is his humility. He allowed Jesus to smear his eyes with a paste of spittle and mud and he went and washed in the pool as Jesus told him. How many are so humble and obedient before God?

Meanwhile the Pharisees who are not physically blind choose to keep their hearts and minds closed to all that they are seeing and being told and therefore the ones who remain blind and in sin as Jesus says.

When confronted by things that are beyond our strength or understanding, we right should have humility and open ourselves to God's help and vision.

Everyone is pondering the meaning of the coronavirus. Some are wondering if it some sort of conspiracy. Some are criticizing and looking to blame those making decisions about our response. Others are wondering whether God is punishing us. The truth is that we really do not know. However, as Fr. Mike Schmitz said in a recent video on-line: "When the people of God in the scriptures experienced challenging events like this, they saw them as a call from God to conversion and repentance – a time to take a deeper look at their lives and their values."

That is the best that we and our world can do. We need to humbly open our selves to a deeper look at ourselves, our world and our values. As we hear and see in the media, many are doing just that – taking time to think and to make sacrifices of themselves to help others. So already we can say "thanks be to God" for allowing us this much needed opportunity to do these things. Of course, as with Jesus, many are suffering in innocence so that we might have this opportunity for reflection and healing in our world.

As many have also said to me, what a blessing that this is all happening in Lent – a time of grace given to us by God

for reconciliation with God and one another. And what a help the “social distancing” is also giving us as it takes away so many things like sports, and eating out, and shopping and travel that we have allowed to distract us from the prayer and reflection that we need in our life!

May God bless and help us and our world to use this time of grace to grow in faith and love and close to God and to each other. As St. Paul says in today’s second reading, it is time for us to wake up and let the gift of light that has been given to us by God to shine forth in the darkness that is around us.

When we take an overall look at all that is happening – this is actually not an unusual Lent – this is what Lent is really about and what it is supposed to be like.