**4th Sunday of Lent**
Cycle A, 3.26.17
1 Samuel 16:1,6-7, 10-13/Ephesians 5:8-14/John 9:1-41

I CAN SEE CLEARLY NOW – GOD’S GRACE HAS COME

A popular novel from the early twentieth century was also made into a movie a number of years ago, entitled “A Room With a View.” An older British woman, Miss Bartlett, was chaperoning her younger cousin, Lucy, on her first trip to Italy. They were looking for a pleasant change in Florence from the foggy chill of England. When they got to the Pensione Bertolini where they were to stay, Mrs. Bartlett registered her complaint out loud: *They promised us south rooms with a view; instead we have north rooms, looking into a courtyard.*

When another guest and his nephew offered to switch rooms with the two women, Mrs. Bartlett, a rather fussy woman, refused the offer. It offended her British propriety and was, in her estimation, an invasion of their privacy. *Well, did she or did she not want a room with a view? Having traveled so far did she or did she not want to experience Italy?* Even the hotel they chose makes the reader wonder. The Pensione Bertolini was a thoroughly “British” island in the midst of Florence. All the guests were genteel English ladies and proper British gentlemen. The dining room had a picture of Queen Victoria and a schedule of services at the Anglican Church. Even the ‘signorina’ who ran the place had a cockney accent. It made young Lucy remark to her cousin: *Don’t you feel we might be in London? I can hardly believe that all kinds of other things are just outside.*

As the prim and proper British woman was offered a chance to expand her horizon and experience something new, so Christ offers us by way of today’s Gospel a “room with a view.” With the pharisees we may be just as ambivalent about taking him up on his offer. We live such enclosed lives. We long to escape this enclosure, the confinement of our pettiness, our egocentric concerns, worries and biases and replace them with a fresher view of reality. Along comes Christ with a Gospel that can open us up the way a view of Florence in all its splendor might. And yet as individuals and as a Church we hesitate. We cling to familiar ways; we rationalize ourselves into remaining stuck where we are. Like Miss Bartlett, we close the shutters upon a view and a way of being too blindingly bright, too potentially wonderful to be tolerable.

The Pharisees and the religious professionals of John’s gospel refused to switch for a room with a view. They lacked the eyes of faith. They were so sure of everything—that God did not work on Sundays, that Moses was God’s only spokesman, that anyone born blind had to be a sinner and ditto for anyone who broke the Sabbath, that God did not work through sinners, that God did not work on sinners and that furthermore no one could teach them anything. Their system was a closed one and it worked. It closed Jesus out and it closed them in—not in outer darkness this time, but in inner darkness—because they let their fear of being wrong keep them from being in the light. The formerly blind man, meanwhile, was given new sight and a clear view. He was staring right into the light. *"Lord, I believe,"* he said when he laid eye's on Jesus at last. And he worshiped him.
The “closed system” which characterized the scribes and pharisees, is at work in our world too. Cruel tyrants live in the lap of luxury while their own people languish. Politicians protecting their own turf and that of our nation’s wealthiest would cut off aid to some of the neediest Americans and shortchange children’s education and health programs. Our government leaders are deadlocked with no desire to compromise. Our church leaders leave no room for dialogue but speak only in absolutes and make decisions without consultation, even while failing to monitor their own responsibilities in the face of abuse and mismanagement. And we, too, who think the world is black-and-white, who admit to no shades of grey as we claim our airtight certitudes... we refuse to embrace the ambiguity and uncertainty which are an inevitable part of our personal and family lives. Blindness of the mind and heart is as dark as that of the blind man in the gospel whom Jesus healed.

When Miss Bartlett finally gave in to the gentlemen who offered to switch rooms and accepted their “rooms with a view,” Miss Bartlett spent the first moments in her room making sure all the doors and shutters had locks. Her young charge, Lucy (whose name means ‘light’) instead flung wide the windows and leaned out into the sunshine to take in the beautiful hills, the marbles churches, the gurgling river, the crowded trains, and somersaulting children. Life, the world, people in all their wonder and worth released Lucy’s repressed capacity for universal love.

One of our challenges during the forty days of Lent is to unlock the door, throw open the shutters, and take a chance of experiencing some serendipity in our lives – those chance encounters that can put us in touch with what’s really important in life. We put ourselves on a different track so the Lord can show us that we just might be wrong about some things. Some traditions aren’t worth holding onto. Some people who, at first glance, seem insignificant or inconsequential to us may be the bearers of grace. Some tasks that seem a waste of time may actually be rich in meaning for us if we carry them out with love and devotion. Some days that seem dark and dismal, that we dread because of the challenges they contain, may actually be a path to growth and knowledge.

This Lenten season began for us in darkness -- smeared with black and sooty ashes. Those ashes, which have been left near the scripture stand, are a symbol of something that once was on fire, but now signs of a light that was extinguished. As our Lenten journey draws us closer to Easter, however, we begin to move gradually into the light. On the First Sunday of Lent we caught a glimpse of a clearer vision in our struggle against temptation through Jesus’ victory over Satan in the wilderness. On the Second Sunday we recalled the promise of a share in the radiance of God’s glory through Jesus’ transfiguration. On the Third Sunday we experienced the freedom that comes when deeds of darkness are brought to light in the presence of Jesus’ forgiveness, as they were for the Samaritan woman at the well. And today, on the Fourth Sunday of Lent, we share the joy that comes when our insight into the true meaning of life is restored. Now we can open our eyes as Christ opened the eyes of that blind man. The Lord can strip away the scales that distort our vision and can help us abandon the inner blindness...
to which we cling. Amazing grace will wipe clean the sin-streaked windows of our hearts, expanding our horizons beyond what seems at first glance, toward what is in the all-seeing eye of God.

Is there a shuttered window within your own mind and heart behind which, like Miss Bartlett, you block your yearning for light and beauty? Insulate yourself from all surprise? Is there a blindness in our lives that prevents us from seeing the power and presence of God at work? Let’s invite Christ to open those shutters, touch our eyes and our souls, as he did Lucy’s and that of the man in the gospel, giving us a wider view and clearer vision. With the shutters open and the view wider, there’s no telling how much more of God’s “amazing grace” we can take in.

Fr. John Kasper, OSFS