

2020 March 22

Fourth Sunday of Lent

Readings:

First: 1 Samuel 16.1b, 6-7, 10-13, "The spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David." (13b)

Psalm: 23, 'The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want'. (1)

Second: Ephesians 5.8-14, "Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." (14c)

Gospel: John 9.1-41, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed and now I see." (15b)

Anointing transforms

We have two different anointings in today's readings. Samuel anoints David with oil as the king for the Israelites and Jesus anoints the blind man with clay made out of his spittle and mud. Both anointings are significant, powerful and empowering. They transformed the anointed ones. The material with which the anointing is done seems immaterial for the recipient. We believe that 'anointing' brings down power from God.

Sacramental anointings are with a material things and often done by human mediation, but the action and power flow from God's design. Thus we have anointing in baptism, confirmation, holy Orders and in sickness. These are sacraments, which mean the invisible grace/Spirit of God being imparted through a visible human action. The effects and power of this divine touch work on the anointed ones, first transforming them spiritually and physically, and then empowering to do God's work following God's design. Sometimes the anointing happens at the initiative of God and at other times as a human desire, request and necessity. David's anointing seems to have started from God, but there was a need perceived by the prophet and the people of God because of the inaction and ineffectiveness of King Saul, whom David replaced.

In the gospel incident the blind man makes the request, perceiving and feeling the need for healing and sight. Both David and the blind man were empowered to take up new missions, the former to rule Israel and gather together and nurture a people for God, and the latter to witness to God's presence among the people and to glorify God. The illiterate blind beggar at the street corner suddenly turned out to be a 'powerful teacher' and a convincing witness to the glory of God.

In both these incidents the human and the divine perceptions and designs are different. Samuel was fascinated by the physical features of the first son of Jesse, but God did not choose him and the other six. He chose the last and perhaps the least important one. In the case of the blind man human perception considered his blindness as a consequence of the sins of his ancestors, and God's design was to transform the blind man into a powerful witness to the glory of God. Reflecting on the contrasts of human and divine perceptions let us act upon the advice of St. Paul today, ***"Once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light"*** (Ephesians 5:8).

Fr. George