

Fr. Ed Suszynski
Pastor, Our Lady Help of Christians
Homily 4th Sunday of Lent, year A

“I want to see.” In all four Gospels in the Bible, there is a story of a blind person being healed of their affliction. Unlike the account we hear this 4th Sunday of Lent, Year A (Jn 9:1-41), in Luke’s account (Lk 18:25-43), we hear the blind person specifically express the desire to see. At the same time, “I want to see,” speaks to the heart of where we are as a people during the coronavirus pandemic.

I can tell you with 100% certainty, that these are not the words I’d be sharing just weeks ago. I also suspect with great deal of certainty, that all of us want to see in some way. We desire to see other people while self-isolating. We want to see places where we gather be normal. We want to see people free from suffering. We want to see people live, not die. We want to see what the future holds. We want to see what will happen with our finances. We want to see what our education systems will look like for the school year. Basically, we just want to see the world around us be normal.

There are times where it seems like the Holy Spirit has a way of coordinating things in such a way that it makes sense. For example, when we were doing the Bible study on the Blessed Mother, the lessons about the Annunciation and Christmas happened during Advent and the lesson about Mary at the Cross happened during Lent, all very timely. This Sunday is referred to as Laetare Sunday, Laetare meaning *rejoice*. Something feels off here. It’s difficult to think about rejoicing amidst the coronavirus pandemic. For those who help, healthcare workers, first responders, and volunteers there are feelings of gratitude, but the idea of rejoicing, not the first to come to mind. Rather, these times feel like a reversion, like we’ve gone back to the First Sunday of Lent with Jesus in the desert.

Perhaps now, we can gain new strength from Jesus’ desert experience. In the desert Jesus was isolated from the rest of humanity but yet He knew He was not alone. Jesus spent the time in fasting and prayer, much like we are doing during Lent. When tempted by the Devil, Jesus said, *“One does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.”* This testifies to us, that God’s Word, and Jesus Himself who is The Word Made Flesh, is alive and true! Even in our deepest hungers or driest desert times, God’s Word is Living Water quenching our Thirst. While we might be isolating, we are never ever completely isolated.

Later on, the Devil further tempts Jesus with possessing power and pride and in the end He says, “Get away, Satan!” In these times of isolation, when things are quiet like they’ve never been before, we can hear things, sometimes these things are messages or voices that speak untruths or tempt us. Whenever we are confronted with messages contrary to God’s love or things contrary to who we are as beloved children of God, let us quote The Savior and say, *Get away, Satan!*

What was the desert for Jesus? Well, any time we see a period of 40 days or years in Sacred Scripture (Noah and the Flood, Israelites in the desert, etc.), it signals to us a time of purification or preparation. In Jesus' case, he confronted the evil that faces humanity. Also, coming out of the desert experience, Jesus is prepared, prepared to minister. Jesus goes forth to proclaim the Good News, proclaim liberty to the captives, to let the oppressed go free and yes, to bring recovery of sight to the blind.

So here we are, in the midst of an interesting desert experience. Like Jesus, we can use this time to be prepared. At the end of the COVID-19 crisis, what do you want to see? Beyond the normal, what do you want to see? What's the new perspective? Is it a better relationship with your family? To be a better communicator? To be able to trust God more? To think of others before yourself more? What is it that you desire to see?

Simply put, the lyrics of *Day by Day* from Godspell, "Day by day, Oh, Dear Lord, three things I pray. To see thee more clearly, Love thee more dearly, Follow thee more nearly, day by day," summarize what we should be about, what we should desire to see.

Even still, at times the desert can feel like it breaks us down. However, the desert can also build us up like muscle torn apart and built up in weightlifting. Although unplanned, we are in a time where we can step back and let The Lord smear healing clay on the eyes of our hearts and souls; to help us get reacquainted with what is truly important. We need to remember that we are a people of faith, strong and resilient, for The Lord is with us!

Strength and resilience are the living words given to us in Psalm 23 in which it says: *The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.* The second reading from Ephesians (5:8-14) says to us: *Live as children of light, for light produces every kind of goodness and righteousness and truth. Try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.* These words encourage us to keep in mind that The Lord will refresh our souls, that His rod and staff give us courage and strength. In addition, we have the gift of the Light of Christ within us by virtue of our Baptism.

To bring this to a close, let me offer this. What are some things that can help us see? How can Jesus apply the healing clay? We can always start with an Examination of Conscience. Doing this can identify opportunities for growth and reconciliation. In your prayer time, do some personal visioning with the Lord and create a list of hopes and goals. Lastly, create a plan, what are the small things you'll do to achieve your hopes and goals? Don't forget to make sure The Lord is part of each step to help you, "to see Thee more clearly, love Thee more dearly, follow Thee more nearly, day by day."