

4th Lent- A
John 9

Laetare Jerusalem. Rejoice Jerusalem

That was how our entrance antiphon began our Mass, this 4th Sunday of Lent, our midway point towards our celebration of the cross and resurrection.

*Rejoice, Jerusalem, and all who love her.
Be joyful, all who were in mourning;
Exult and be satisfied...*

Our Lenten practices have been leading us to examine what keeps us from the fullness of the Father's free grace. We give up small pleasures, we initiate new devotional practices, we give alms and we fast.

This Laetare Sunday is meant to give us affirmation and joy in what is a very sober season. So today, let our hearts embrace the joy won for us by Christ. Let us turn our faces towards the Light.

In the end, it is all about the light.

St. Paul said,
*You were once darkness,
But now you are light in the Lord.
Live as children of light.*

In our Gospel, Jesus proclaimed,
I am the light of the world.

It is all about the light. It is all about leaving darkness behind. It is our story. It is the story of creation.

*In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth—
and the earth was without form or shape, with darkness over the abyss
and a mighty wind sweeping over the waters—
Then God said: Let there be light, and there was light. (Gn 1:1)*

And that is the story of our man born blind.

Born into darkness, tossed to the margins of society to live a life of begging, he was approached by Jesus.

Jesus was physical with him, real to him through saliva from his divine self and clay of the earth. Jesus made God's fullness present to the man, instilling him with confidence to walk towards the light by cleansing in the waters of his tradition.

Our story is a story of a man continuing to see more clearly and more clearly.

When doubters accused him of not being the one born blind, he asserted, "I am." That echoes God's self-naming to Moses at the burning bush, "I am who am." (Ex 3:14). May this man be starting to comprehend the divine work being accomplished in him?

When first asked who did this, he said, "The man called Jesus..." Later, when asked by the Pharisees, he said, "He is a prophet", a clearer understanding.

When summoned again, the man born blind said, "*If this man were not from God, he would not be able to do anything.*" The man was accused of being Jesus' disciple. He refused to deny it under threat of expulsion, and was thrown out.

Jesus found him, asking him if he believed "*in the Son of Man*", a title associated with the awaited messiah.

The man then heard his liberation from darkness, "*You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he,*" to which the man born blind surrendered himself to the light: "*I do believe Lord,*" and he worshipped him.

Jesus then spoke to him... and really to us, "*I came into this world...that those who do not see might see.*"

Yes, that's us, folks. At least that's us if we have the humility of the man born blind. Sometimes, I have the arrogance of a Pharisee. I mean I've been catechized, studied theology at Notre Dame and St. Mary's-of-the-Woods... I'm a deacon for crying out loud. And when I prance like that, the devil smiles.

If this Lenten time of reflection has done anything for me, it has been to show me how insufficient I am in seizing holiness. When I am made most humble, when I am begging from the street, I most clearly see Jesus' approach, for I dearly desire to see Jesus' approach.

When I put myself in the man born blind's place, I find myself flashing back to my fire-fighting days.

When one enters a burning house, it isn't like the movies with bright flashing flames. It is one of complete, smoke-filled darkness. A whole room may be involved in flame, but it might not be seen from the next room. One locates the flames by following the sense of heat. You turn this way, it's not so hot. You turn that way, it's starting to get hotter. It's just like our children's game of finding something, "You're getting colder, you're getting warmer," until you start to see a faint glow to which you rush.

That is my story of being blind and finding the light. It serves me in my search for Jesus, because I know the sense of desperation when I am blind. I experience the thrill when I glimpse my heart's desire.

Thankfully, I don't have to crawl into burning buildings anymore to capture that feeling. I know the smoke-filled rooms of my life. This penitential period calls me to examine them. And I don't have to go far to search for Jesus. It is sometimes just as simple as "crawling" in humility to this altar with you to find Jesus approaching me, my saving light.

So, it is with rejoicing, *Laetare*, that I come with my blindness to this altar.