

Homily for 4th Sunday of Lent
March 22, 2020
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Today we celebrate the fourth Sunday of Lent. As we enter into the readings, please forgive me a brief observation, in which it seems that the eternal word of God speaks directly to our daily experience today. We are separated today from each other by distance because of Corona virus, the word corona itself means crown. Which I think should give us pause during this time of mortification and preparation to ask, 'What is it that I crown?' Most of us are at home now online work, online school, wrangling kids, and with limited social interaction. But do you have more time? The non-essential travel, social functions, extracurricular activities, kids sports, televised sport, and many other things have been strictly reduced or totally removed, But with all that free time, what have we crowned in its place? What disposition of mind and soul have taken the place of our daily busy lives.

Perhaps God is giving us this time to quiet down. Perhaps he is silencing much of the fighting and arguing in the world to give us the opportunity to look inward, to sit with Him and ask what He really wants of us in our world. Bishop Barron brought this up in a recent homily of his, quoting Blaise Pascal, "All of humanities problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly alone in a room."

Perhaps he's asking us to crown this time that we have instead of adding more and more. Let us simplify instead of amplifying let us simplify. Perhaps our loving Father is directing us to humanity's greatest problems, by forcing us to sit quietly in a room and speak with him. Let us simplify, not amplify. Let us look at this with the eyes of God and not the eyes of man, for God sees different than does man. Our external life is at present chaotic. But collectively the world is terrified of something far greater than any petty dispute or battle that were going on, and so were to sort of forced into a silence, a peace. Perhaps we need to internalize this.

How does this fit within the context of the readings today?

In our first reading from Samuel, is commanded by God to go and anoint a new king of Israel. The people wanting to be like all others around them have begged God for a king, and now they want another one. Samuel, to his own dismay, is led to a teenage shepherd. Shepherding was a bottom tier job, quite undesirable, but God who wishes to rule His people alone, raises this shepherd to be a pivotal link in salvation.

As a brief aside, note that a young teenage man has the Holy Spirit rush upon him and as a man after the heart of God, he transforms the world and covenant that God has formerly established with His people. Hundreds of years later, we will here of a young teenage woman after the heart of God, whom the Holy Spirit 'rushes upon' and by her submission transforms the world and the covenant that God has established with his people. Neither of them would have amounted to anything in the eyes of man, but through the eyes of God they are hinge points of the plan He has established for Salvation.

Psalm 23

If does not know much of scripture, most likely, one is still familiar with Psalm 23. It is a Psalm of comfort and peace, a psalm to rest the weary soul, in which we're told that the one who gave us life, who breathed into the clay, walks with us and guides us to Himself. That He, and no other, will

provide for any eventuality. That He loves us and calls us to Himself. What a fitting cry to our Lord in this time of trial, as well as a declaration of our faith in Him and his plan.

Ephesians

Ephesus was a center of the occult in the ancient world and indeed was the town where ingredients, spellbooks and spiritual services were obtained. The occult was the driving force of the economy in Ephesus and for the early Christians living there, it was a spiritual battle ground, as Paul later speaks of battling Principalities and Powers. The secrecy and dark spirituality that blankets the city may only be pierced by Christ, for he shines in every darkness. For us, we too experience the reality of the faith through a veil. The veil of this mortal life, the veil of the sacraments, the veil of the symbolism, and presently the veil of distance. But Paul makes clear that Christ, who dwells within us by Baptism, can pierce any veil and enlighten any darkness. For he is a light that shines everywhere a light that cannot be dimmed, a light that even when seems to be snuffed out in his crucifixion shines ever brighter in his resurrection.

Gospel of John

Why is this story so important? No matter the year, we always hear this passage on the fourth Sunday. How does this all fit? Is it about more than seeing better?

In the Old Testament a man deformed from birth was believed to indicate someone in the family had gravely sinned, hence the question in the Gospel. And it was held that such a deformity, given by God's displeasure, could not be healed by any man. So, when Christ comes to heal this man, he does not merely to fix a sight problem, rather to recreate his eyes. No longer eyes of man, but the eyes of God. Spit and clay point back to the creation story, in which God creates man ex nihilo. Christ is telegraphing that He is the Messiah, the Son of Man, sent to recreate the world.

Throughout the interrogation of the Pharisees and scribes, they keep saying "we see, we see, we see, we see, it as you who are blind." And yet they are blind to the truth spoken to them by their fathers, by the very word of God. During this exchange, it has been established that they were celebrating the feast of tabernacles. During which huge candelabras shown out from on top of the temple mount upon all of Jerusalem As this light is shining out, Christ is making the point that the temple that they stand before is empty and dead. They look to rules they look to regulations but they do not look internally to the one who dwells within their very soul. The one who calls them out of darkness, the one who gives them everything they need.

And as the blind is interrogated he begins to see more and more of Christ and with the eyes of God. Arguing that only a man of God, a great prophet could do what Jesus had done. Eventually recognizing that Jesus is the kurios, the Christ, the Messiah; at which point he worships him.

Another brief side note, the Scribes and Pharisees declare themselves to be disciples of Moses, not God, but Moses. It brings to mind their later declaration that, "We have no king, but Caesar," in the Palm Sunday Gospel. In their zeal they seem to miss the point, harmatia - missing the mark or sin, as we talked about last week. They have crowned the wrong thing. In this gospel it says right it'll be that the punishment will be meted out to the third fourth generation. So we see this interesting interplay going on here of those who come to true faith, have a great sight, a sight that sees with the eyes of

God and not the eyes of man. That sees the spiritual reality of the one who is healed, not merely the transformation of a physical deformity or lack. Eyes that can see the false worship of the law and ritual; and the reality of the true worship, the worship of Christ Jesus.

As we come to the end of the Gospel, we hear the question, "Who sinned?" Christ tells us that it's not it's not about a sin per say, but rather is about God's glory being manifest. The blazing temple is a false likeness. It's idolatrous to worship these rules.

Why? Because God is the way the truth and the life, and "I (Christ) stand before you (Scribes and Pharisees) and declare that I Am Him. The fire that blazes on the temple mount is nothing compared to the fire that blazes within Me." Christ comes to establish true worship in a new covenant, so our gospel today warns us about false worship. Therefore we must look to our shepherd. To know how to worship. To know where to go. He's the way, the truth, the life. He is the sheep gate. We must look interiorly and encounter Him within our souls, not in some sort of pantheistic way, but truly in the indwelling of the trinity, that we may hear Him.

This can be tough, especially in this time in which we live. Because we have so many distractions. So many other things. Even the sacraments themselves are veiled to us, right? I mean, even when we come to Mass every Sunday and we're able to see the Eucharist as the priest consecrates Him, and hear the words in person, sit within the sacred space that has been set apart exclusively for the worship of God, and adorned in such a way as to draw us ever deeper into these realities. Still the truth is veiled. In this time, the truth is veiled even further, for we cannot even come to see those things. And yet God calls us. To go deeper, into the quiet to seek Him out ever more. To strip away the veils that we have placed within our own lives. And through time with Him and contemplation of Him. To come to an illumination of who He is and how He sees us.

My brothers and sisters. We have a unique opportunity here. During this time of Lent and self-quarantine; put down the book, put down the TV remote, to step aside and enter into prayer with those whom we love. With a God, who has given us everything. Who watches over us. Who draws us to himself. I challenge you this week to take that time. 20-30 minutes a day. Maybe you can't keep it all silent, fine. Read a book of a saint or spiritual reading, perhaps even the word of God.

What a beautiful practice: Lectio Divina - five or six verses pray it. Silence for a few minutes. Pray it again. Silence for a few minutes. Pray it again. Silence. Within those silences. We ask God to enlighten us to what it is that he wishes of us. That we may shine forth as a light upon a hill, that we may be other Christs in the world. That others may have hope. That others may experience his love. May God bless and keep you all. Amen.