

## Homily Notes, 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent, A, March 22, 2020

Readings: 1 Sam 16:1-13; Eph 5:8-14; Jn 9:1-41

**1. Summary: Today's readings show us that it is Jesus who overcomes darkness and blindness which, in turn, protects us from the dangers of sin and evil and guides us to the wisdom of God.**

**An example of coming to the light, G. Gordon Liddy as reported by Charles Coulson in *Against the Night*.**

**Introduction: The fourth Sunday of Lent is known as "Laetare (Rejoice) Sunday," expressing the Church's joy in anticipation of the Resurrection.**

**Today's readings both remind us that it is God who gives us proper vision in body as well as in soul, and instruct us that we should be constantly on our guard against spiritual blindness.**

**Scripture lessons:**

**2. In the first reading** we see how even the mature and wise prophet Samuel could not discern who to anoint. God guided him to judge not by appearances (externals) but by the heart (internal qualities). Here we learn a precious principle:

"But the Lord said to Samuel: "Do not judge from his appearance or from his lofty stature, because I have rejected him. Not as man sees does God see, because man sees the appearance but the Lord looks into the heart" (1 Sam 16:7).

We aren't as wise as Samuel. How can we obtain the wisdom of God? We need to know the Sacred Scriptures, the Apostolic Tradition, and the Teaching of the Church.

**3. To be able to see to determine who or what is real we must take into account the Word of God, the Tradition and Teaching of the Church, then evaluate the integrity, the reputation, and the substance of those attempting to lead.**

**Furthermore, I would suggest that we need to judge such persons by their Words, by their Deeds, by their reputation, prudently evaluating their integrity.**

**Concerning such judgment, Jesus says in the Gospel reading, "I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see might see, and those who do see might become blind.**

**If we do not have the wisdom of God to guide us, we could be deceived by appearances.**

**4. Responsorial Psalm: The Lord is my Shepherd, nothing shall I want.** Today, with the issues of this coronavirus what do we need? Toilet paper? Medicines? Have we been blind and let our medicinal supplies, even our medicine itself, be in the hands of our enemies? If the Lord really is our shepherd, would he not guide us to be prudent and not dependent on the Chinese or other countries for our medicines and other necessities? Maybe we have not had the Lord as our Shepherd? Is this the fault of the Lord or have we let ourselves be blinded by cheap prices and be denying dangers and enemies? A good shepherd protects the flock from dangers.

**5. The Gospel reading** teaches us the necessity of opening the eyes of the mind by faith. It also warns us that those who think that they can see and understand are often blind, while those who acknowledge their blindness (who are really more honest about themselves) are given clear vision. Here, the most unlikely person, namely the blind man, receives the light of faith in Jesus, while the religion-oriented, law-educated, but pride-filled Pharisees remain spiritually blind. Why do they remain blind? Because they cannot stand to admit the truth, the divinity of Jesus.

**6. The Fathers and Doctors of the Church have always seen this miracle as symbolizing this sacrament of Baptism** in which, through the medium of water, the soul is cleansed of (the darkness of) sin and receives the light of faith. But does this cleansing occur automatically?

What could hinder it? "Like men with sore eyes, they find the light painful, while darkness, which permits them to see nothing, is restful and agreeable" (until disaster arrives, unseen and unannounced) (Dio Chrysostom A.D. 40-120 – Greek Orator).

**If we do not have the wisdom of God to guide us, we could be as blind as the Pharisees.**

**7. In the second reading,** St Paul reminds Christians of their new responsibility as children of light *to live as children of the light, producing every kind of goodness and righteousness and truth.*” This opens the door to issues of light and darkness, of good and evil. To see the full power of this reading, we need to read it in context. Notice that St. Paul speaks here in imperative terms, commands not options. He is laying out goals to be accomplished, not a condition automatically given.

Hence, Paul reminds Christians of their new responsibility as children of light: *“You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. **Live as children of the light, for light produces every kind of goodness and righteousness and truth.** Try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.”*

**If we do not have the light of God to guide us, we could live in the darkness of sin and evil. How well do we see when in darkness? If we live in darkness could we expect to be able to see, anything?**

**We, too, would then expect to imitate Jesus in his judgment, at least identifying those who can see and those who are blind. Do you want your daughter or son to marry someone who is living in the dark?**

**8. Conclusion: how important is it to be in the light so we can see! In the case of this coronavirus illness we need to listen to our competent authorities in order to be safe. Compare us to Italy. We have total of about 260 deaths from this illness. The Italians had over 800 deaths just last Saturday. They were slow to react. We were much faster. They, apparently, weren't very obedient. We have been rather obedient to our leaders. They had a much less prepared single payer, government run health system. Not good.**

**Again, to be able to see to determine who or what is real we must take into account the Word of God, the Tradition and Teaching of the Church, then evaluate the integrity, the reputation, and the substance of those attempting to lead.**

#### **Additional Reflections**

**9. This theme of light and darkness suggests the importance of the "formation of conscience."** (See John Paul II, Encyclical, "The Splendor of the Truth", ## 43-44 and 54-64. St Bonaventure teaches that "conscience is like God's herald and messenger; it does not command things on its own authority, but commands them as coming from God's authority, like a herald when he proclaims the edict of the king. This is why conscience has binding force." In 1994 Pope John Paul II felt that he had to warn the entire church about an erroneous understanding of conscience, that it comes ready made, not needing to be formed. How many and how great are the benefits of knowing how to make a good confession?

**If we did not have the wisdom of God to enlighten our conscience, could we ever know even ourselves?**

**10. Continual formation.** This section of Ephesians shows us that baptism does not do everything automatically, but that we must continue to be formed in the light, avoiding the things of darkness. If we do not care about Jesus and the content of the Word of God, we could look as foolish as the Pharisees in the Gospel.

**11. We need to know both the specifics of darkness and those of light.** Looking at St. Paul's theme of light and darkness in context. In the lectionary reading for this Sunday from Ephesians, we hear St. Paul reminding Christians of our new responsibility as children of light to live as such.

In Eph 5:1ff we find a call to "imitate God". VV 3-5 detail behavior that a Christian should never do and will result in condemnation to Hell. The big three here all deal with sexuality: immorality (pornos – general sexual sin), impurity (contamination) and greed (excessive desire). But we do well to back up to see the context. See how the Greeks used money from prostitution to build a temple to the gods.

Eph 4:25-32 describes in detail "Things that must be banished from life." See "Serious Sin list."

Eph 4:17-24 describes "things which must be abandoned."

Eph 4:14-16 introduces this section with the importance of "Growing into Christ..."

#### **8. Life Messages:**

- 1) We need to avoid judging by appearances and judge by the heart (by the substance of the matter.
- 2) We need to allow Jesus to heal our spiritual blindness and live as children of the light.
- 3) We must become clear from the Word of God how good and evil are defined.