

Fourth Sunday of Lent

March 26, 2017



O God, who through your Word
reconcile the human race to yourself in a wonderful way,
grant, we pray, that with prompt devotion and eager faith
the Christian people may hasten
toward the solemn celebrations to come.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Collect for the Fourth Sunday of Lent

Thinking about all the technological advances in this new millennium the gift of sight has taken a new meaning. It was only a few short years ago that people were using telephones, and then not too much later we had fax machines, and then we had the advent of cell phones. There are people who remember “party lines” where several people were on one line with different rings. MTU students don’t remember any of this.

Using just the telephone could have been the disadvantage in trying to really understand what a person was saying. In other words, there was no possibility of seeing the person so we could use another sense to understand what was being said. Reflecting on this, imagine being blind and think about how this person could fully understand the message of others.

The advent of Skype and FaceTime has opened many doors in our ability to communicate. These two technological advances allow us not only to hear a person but to also see the person which can deepen our ability to understand what is being said. International students as well as other students relish using these tools.

On this Fourth Sunday of Lent, we are challenged to the Liturgy of the Word to have a fuller understanding of what it means to truly see.

The first reading for today is taken from 1 Samuel 16 (1 Samuel 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a). The scene is such that the Israelites told Samuel that they wanted a king like the other people in whose midst they lived. Samuel was given the authority to anoint one of the sons of Jesse to be their king. When Samuel arrived with his horn oil to anoint the king, Jesse presented seven sons. When Eliab was presented to Samuel, he thought “Surely the anointed is here before the LORD.”



The answer of the Lord was quite surprising:

“Do not judge from his appearance or from his lofty stature, because I have rejected him. God does not see as a mortal, who sees the appearance. The LORD looks into the heart.”

This answer of the Lord points out to us that seeing is more than outward appearances. The advent of our technological advances allows us to see with our ears and make judgments about body language which also implies a deeper reality and what we are seeing.

What the Lord was saying to Samuel caused him to ask the question of Jesse “Are these all the sons you have?” (1 Samuel 16:11) Jesse then told Samuel that he had one more son who is out tending the sheep. Samuel, only seeing superficially, may wonder what God was doing when David was brought into his presence. “He was ruddy, a youth with beautiful eyes, and good looking. The LORD said: There—anoint him, for this is the one! Then Samuel, with the horn of oil in hand, anointed him in the midst of his brothers, and from that day on, the spirit of the LORD rushed upon.”



(1 Samuel 16:12-13)

Hindsight is 20/20. In many ways, David was the greatest king that Israel had and Jesus is a descendent of the house of David.

In the Liturgy, Psalm 23, attributed to David, is our response to the first reading. The Psalm speaks of God’s loving care for the psalmist who is portrayed under the figures of a shepherd for the flock (Ps 23:1-4) and a host’s generosity toward a guest (Ps 23:5-6). The imagery of both sections is drawn from traditions of the exodus. Our response is meant to deepen our gift of sight so we see deeper than with a superficial vision.

When we come to the second reading, taken from the letter of Paul to the Ephesians (Ephesians 5:8-14), the Church brings to us a deeper perception as to what sight means. “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light, for light produces every kind of goodness and righteousness and truth.” (Ephesians 5:8-9)



Finally, our gospel for today (John 9:1-41), is meant to be used for those entering the Church as catechumens and candidates. It is also meant for each of us as we renew our own Baptismal commitment at the Easter Vigil.

“As he (Jesus) passed by he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’ Jesus answered, ‘Neither he nor his parents sinned; it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him. We have to do the works of the one who sent me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work.’ (John (1-4)

The question of the disciples is why this man had been inflicted with blindness. It was looked upon as an affliction because of sinfulness either of him or his parents. This is a question that is even present in our world. Many of us can say “What did I do wrong to

deserve this?" There is a book, *When bad things happen to good people*, by Rabbi Harold Kushner, written in 2007, who struggled with the dilemma of why his young boy was afflicted with a degenerative disease.

The chapter titles can speak volumes to each of us:

Why I wrote this book

The story of a man named Job

No exceptions for nice people

God helps those who stop hurting themselves

Why do the righteous suffer?

Sometimes there is no reason

God leaves us room to be human

God can't do everything,

but he can do some important things

What good, then, is religion?

When we continue with the gospel we hear the words of Jesus: "While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.' When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva, and smeared the clay on his eyes, and said to him, 'Go wash in the Pool of Siloam' (which means Sent). So he went and washed, and came back able to see." (John 9:5-7)



At the time of the burning bush in the book of Exodus, Moses listened to this summons of God who called out to him. God said to him: "I am the God of your father', he continued, 'the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God ... 'if I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what do I tell them?' God replied to Moses: 'I am who I am.' Then he added: 'This is what you will tell the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you.'" (Exodus 3: 8, 13-14) Then Jesus said to the disciples I AM the light of the world the Jewish apostles heard Jesus calling himself God.

Jesus, sending the man to the Pool of Siloam, to wash out his eyes, speaks to us today of the Sacrament of Baptism.

In that society, a person who is blind had no way of supporting himself other than being a beggar. The questioning of the neighbors would be something we would do today when we had no idea what happened.

The man who would have been blind from birth was brought before the Pharisees who were searching for ways to condemn Jesus. Having the man in front of them caused great consternation. "So, some of the Pharisees said, 'This man is not from God, because he does not keep the Sabbath.' [But] others said, 'How can a sinful man do such signs?' And there was a division among them." (John 9:16)

The questioning continued, going even to his parents. They reiterated that this truly was their son and he was born blind. Unfortunately, they were filled with fear. "His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed

that if anyone acknowledged him as the Messiah, he would be expelled from the synagogue." (John 9:22) For Jews, at this time, being expelled from the synagogue, meant that they could be conscripted into the Roman army because they were no longer considered Jewish.

With this cure, the questioning continued and the many continued to believe that this man was blind because of someone's sin. When all the questioning finally, ended, not



believing the man, he was thrown out of the Pharisee's presence. The ridicule of the once blind man was a foreshadow of how Jesus would be mocked. After that Jesus found the man and asked him about his belief in the Son of Man. The man proclaimed his belief in this and as Jesus said he was the Son of Man the man worshipped him. The response to Jesus speaks of his purpose: "I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see might see, and those who do see might become blind." (John 9:41)

Years later, St. Patrick prayed to have clear vision:

Be thou my vision O Lord of my heart

None other is aught but the King of the seven heavens.

Be thou my meditation by day and night. May it be thou that I behold even in my sleep.

Be thou my speech, be thou my understanding.

Be thou with me, be I with thee. Be thou my father, be I thy son.

Mayst thou be mine, may I be thine. Be thou my battle-shield, be thou my sword.

Be thou my dignity, be thou my delight. Be thou my shelter, be thou my stronghold.

Mayst thou raise me up to the company of the angels.

Be thou every good to my body and soul. Be thou my kingdom in heaven and on earth.

Be thou solely chief love of my heart. Let there be none other, O high King of Heaven.

Till I am able to pass into thy hands,

My treasure, my beloved through the greatness of thy love

Be thou alone my noble and wondrous estate. I seek not men nor lifeless wealth.

Be thou the constant guardian of every possession and every life.

For our corrupt desires are dead at the mere sight of thee.

Thy love in my soul and in my heart -- Grant this to me, O King of the seven heavens.

O King of the seven heavens grant me this -- Thy love to be in my heart and in my soul.

With the King of all, with him after victory won by piety,

May I be in the kingdom of heaven O brightness of the son.

Beloved Father, hear, hear my lamentations.

Timely is the cry of woe of this miserable wretch. O heart of my heart, whatever befall me,

O ruler of all, be thou my vision.