

Cycle A 4th Sunday of Lent

Reading I, 1 Sam 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a

The LORD said to Samuel: "Fill your horn with oil, and be on your way. I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem, for I have chosen my king from among his sons." As Jesse and his sons came to the sacrifice, Samuel looked at Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD's anointed is here before him." 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." In the same way Jesse presented seven sons before Samuel, but Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen any one of these." Then Samuel asked Jesse, "Are these all the sons you have?" Jesse replied, "There is still the youngest, who is tending the sheep." Samuel said to Jesse, "Send for him; we will not begin the sacrificial banquet until he arrives here." Jesse sent and had the young man brought to them. He was ruddy, a youth handsome to behold and making a splendid appearance. The LORD said, "There--anoint him, for this is the one!" Then Samuel, with the horn of oil in hand, anointed David in the presence of his brothers; and from that day on, the spirit of the LORD rushed upon David.

Responsorial Psalm, Ps 23: 1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. In verdant pastures he gives me repose; beside restful waters he leads me; he refreshes my soul.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

He guides me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil; for you are at my side With your rod and your staff that give me courage.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

You spread the table before me in the sight of my foes; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

Only goodness and kindness follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD for years to come.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

Reading II, Eph 5:8-14

Brothers and sisters: 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. Try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the fruitless works of darkness; rather expose them, for it is shameful even to mention the things done by them in secret; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore, it says: "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light."

Gospel, Jn 9:1-41 or 9:1, 6-9, 13-17, 34-38

As Jesus passed by he saw a man blind from birth. 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. His neighbors and those who had seen him earlier as a beggar said, "Isn't this the one who used to sit and beg?" Some said, "It is," but others said, "No, he just looks like him." He said, "I am." They brought the one who was once blind to the Pharisees. Now Jesus had made clay and opened his eyes on a Sabbath. So then the Pharisees also asked him how he was able to see. He said to them, "He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and now I can see." 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. So they said to the blind man again, "What do you have to say about him, since he opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet." They answered and said to him, "You were born totally in sin, and are you trying to teach us?" Then they threw him out. When Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, he found him and said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered and said, "Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?" Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." He said, "I do believe, Lord," and he worshiped him.

A few years ago before I saw the movie the Passion of the Christ, I was reading an article about it and a few words jumped out at me: “Simon came off as a small hero.” For some reason I was intrigued; what could make Simon stand out? I went to the Gospels and saw that he was barely mentioned. When I finally saw the movie, I paid particular attention to Simon...I have to say that I was fascinated with the way he was portrayed. Simon came upon the procession of Jesus struggling with the cross, holding the hand of his child...it was obvious he knew nothing about what was happening. A soldier picked him out at random commanding him to come over. Simon’s protests were useless as the soldier threatened him, demanding he immediately come over to carry the cross. Bewildered, Simon took the weight of the cross on his shoulders. Jesus didn’t go before him or walk behind him. Rather He hooked his arm over the cross and stumbled along, side-by-side, looking right into Simon’s eyes. At first Simon was totally in shock not knowing why or what he had been forced into...we can imagine what was going through his mind: what could this man have done to be carrying a cross to be crucified? Who could this man be? How did I ever get into this mess? As the short journey transpired, and though no words were spoken, he sensed something special about Jesus. Simon carried the cross and he stepped up to defend the helpless, cruelly beaten Jesus....Simon became a small hero. At Calvary, Simon hesitated leaving...it was as if he were torn between staying with this man Jesus he had come to know and returning to his family. I am struck by how similar it can be in our own lives. We are minding our own business and BOOM, something urgent or critical over takes us...we can be easily swept up in a crisis forced to carry a cross. In these times do we respond in faith trusting that Jesus is with us...eye-to-eye so to speak, like he was with Simon? Sooner or later we come to realize something special is happening in our lives...we are not alone...Jesus is with us. Jesus never said life would be easy...but he did say He would be with us always.

Today we see...we see that God loves us so much that He brings us out of the darkness of sin into the light of faith. And many times we find that faith in the most challenging and unlikely places.

The scriptures today are filled with contrasting images of our faith--darkness and light--man and God--blindness and sight. God sees differently than we do and His choices are not to be questioned no matter how unlikely they seem. From the first reading today, a most unlikely young shepherd boy, not seen as worthy by his family, was called from the cold and lonely field to be anointed as king no less and to be possessed by the spirit of the Lord. He was David, the prophesized head of the lineage that ended in Jesus Christ Himself.

In the Gospel we heard about a pitiful beggar, blind from birth, who was touched by Jesus. His new sight was not just in his eyes, rather he saw from his heart and developed a faith in God through a series of trials ending in being banished from the synagogue. Rejected, Jesus found him and raised his belief to the ultimate clarity of vision: faith that Jesus is the Son of God. Tragically, the self-righteous Pharisees who were supposed to know the Christ when he came, failed to recognize their own blindness when He did appear.

Mercy Sr. Karen Schneider, a pediatrician and instructor at Johns Hopkins, delivered a keynote address on Feb. 24 at Loyola University in Baltimore for a Haiti benefit. She was filled with unforgettable experiences from 2 recent trips to Haiti just after the earthquake, so she told 6 heartwarming stories about children she met in Haiti. I would like to share 1 of those stories today...they held important lessons for Sr. Karen and, quite possibly will for us, as well. Each child has a unique perception...about life...about faith...about family...about acceptance and most of all, about hope. Sr. Karen's whole speech is on our St Brendan's website and haitireach.com for you to read.

Sr. Karen said, “on Jan. 17, 5 days after the earthquake struck, 13-year-old Barbara arrived with a dirty rag covering her face, revealing only her left eye, which had severe swelling. Most physicians and nurses have something that gets to them. For me it’s facial deformities. I simply hate them. I steeled myself as I removed the rag. Barbara’s good eye was looking right at me and I didn’t want her to see me cringe. [Her face was a mess.] I could see flesh hanging and some bone showing. Half her nose was missing... I remembered thinking she was only 13, but the whole time she was talking and talking, once in a while taking a deep breath when something I did hurt her... I can understand a little Creole and she was talking about how her faith in God had helped her. ‘I knew God would never abandon me’, she said. ‘When I saw my mother and grandmother dead, I knew God would take care of me. I had been wandering the streets for days and then God helped me find you. From the moment the earth started shaking, I felt God inside me. I knew God would take care of me. When I saw my mother dead I knew that I had to rely on God more.’ Barbara was going to need major reconstructive and plastic surgery. When I explained that we had to take her to the US, she cried with joy in English, ‘Oh thank you Jesus ... I knew you would help me!’ This is a 13-year-old girl whose mother was dead; whose grandmother was dead, who had no house, no food and no face, and all she could do was thank Jesus! Barbara taught me to have the faith of a child in all situations.”

We know that the road of life can be rough and the gate to heaven is narrow. We must hold onto our faith that is nurtured in the Word and in the Eucharist here today; there is one God, one Lord and one Baptism for all. Let us pray that God will use us to bless the people around the world ravaged by the horrific trials of poverty and war, of illness and injury. And if you are enduring some unspoken suffering, think about the blind man and that young Haitian Barbara....have faith to see...see that God is with you as well.