

4th Sunday of Lent A/2011

How do we judge people, the situations we are confronted with, and the things which are happening around us? These questions are important because, unlike God who judges by looking at the heart and not at the external circumstances, most of the time we judge according to our feelings and the appearances.

By doing so, we certainly make mistakes and mislead ourselves. That is why we have to turn to God in order to acquire a balanced judgment and a new perception of reality of things and of people. That is the appeal of the readings of this fourth Sunday of Lent.

The first reading describes the event of the choice of David for the throne of Israel. In fact, in an unexpected way, David is preferred to his brothers and made king. While Jesse thought that one of his oldest sons would become the king, he was surprised to realize that it was the youngest, David, that God chose. While Samuel was impressed by the stature and the look of the oldest sons of Jesse, he was surprised to see that God chose none of them.

What this text teaches us is that God's ways are not human ways; his judgments are not human judgments; he deals with the hearts of people, not with their physical appearance. It teaches us also that, for reasons unknown to us and known only to him, God has a preference for the humble, the weak, the fragile and the poor. Therefore, where there is weakness, fragility and poverty, God can show his strength and his grandeur. That is exactly what happened to the man born blind today's Gospel.

First of all, we have this strange conversation between Jesus and his disciples over the responsibility of being born blind. Who has sinned for this man to be born blind, the disciples ask? This question of the disciples expresses a popular belief and certain conception defended even today by some, namely that disease and misfortune are a consequence of sin.

In his answers, Jesus opposes this popular belief with the reality of God's mystery that transcends human imagination. In fact, there is a mystery that surrounds the life of each one of us with its ups and downs and which we cannot fully understand. In the display of this mystery, God has his time to intervene and put an end to our misery and misfortune, as he did with the man born blind.

In that perspective, every circumstance of our life becomes an opportunity for God to let his glory shine. That is why what matters most is not the cause of our disease or misfortune, but what God can do within them in order to show his glory upon us and around us. Even if it happens that we are not physically healed, God can grant us a spiritual healing so that we cope with our sickness. That has been true in the lives of many people who have experienced God's power and grace upon them in the worst of their health condition.

If any circumstance of life is an opportunity to show God's glory, then, by helping those who are in need, pain and suffering, we, as Christians, demonstrate God's glory to them. That is why the appeal of Lent is that we do not sleep, but instead we take advantage of this wonderful time of prayer and fast in order to stay spiritually awake and to do good to others

through almsgiving. This is the appropriate time to do it and not tomorrow. We have to take advantage of the light of day and work and have our rest at night.

After Jesus has rejected the connection between sin and suffering, then he can heal the blind man. In the process of this healing, it is remarkable that Jesus mixes his saliva with the clay and anoints the eyes of the blind with the recommendation to go and wash his face. Is not that an allusion to the sacrament of baptism with its use of water and the anointment with the holy oil?

That is why the healing of the blind man reminds us that God heals us through the sacraments we receive within the Church. Each sacrament, in its own way, is a manifestation of God's grace through which he shows us his mercy and his forgiveness in order to spiritually heal us.

The problem is always that of knowing if we really recognize Jesus' healing power and accept it. Two categories of people in today's Gospel did not do so, namely the Pharisees and the parents of the healed man. In fact, the Pharisees did not believe at first that the man was born blind. When they could not resist the truth that Jesus healed him, they considered Jesus as a fake prophet, because he performed the miracle on a Sabbath day. And yet, what Jesus has done is a wonderful work that gives glory to God. That is why they remained in their darkness and blindness despite that they had eyes to see.

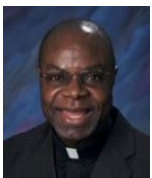
Moreover, as they could not destroy the argument of the healed man, the Pharisees turned bitter and insulting. This episode teaches us that we can easily have differences with people. But when all this develops into insult and abuse, it ceases to be an argument and becomes a contest in bitterness. In that case, what it proves to be is just that our case is weak and we are weak people.

Like the Pharisees, the parents of the blind man were afraid to acknowledge publicly the healing of their son as coming from Jesus. Here we see how fear can be paralyzing even in the presence of the truth. That is why Lent is an invitation to be courageous, an appeal to stand up and tell the truth of Jesus.

Very different is the attitude of the healed man who recognizes Jesus as his savior and Lord. Quite striking also is the fact that Jesus appears only in the beginning of the story and at the end. He does so in order to let the faith of the blind man grow among the difficulties of life.

In fact, what Jesus wants is that we grow in our faith and give witness to him amid the conflicts and hardships of life. The outcome of this process in today's Gospel is that at the beginning, only one was blind; in the end, all are blind and only one can see that Jesus is a prophet and the Lord. May God bless you all!

1 Samuel 16: 1b, 6-7, 10-13a; Ephesians 5, 8-14; John 9:1-41



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