

From darkness, Lord, lead us to lights !

Fourth Sunday of Lent – March 22, 2020

1 Sam 16:16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a; Eph 5:8-14; Jn 9:1-41

Jesus said: "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (Jn 9:5)

Prologue: Light is a rich symbol not only in Christianity, but in almost all religious traditions. The title has 'lights' in the plural because we can reflect upon many lights, which we are either aware or unaware of: (a) daylight; (b) sunlight; (c) natural lights like moonlight and starlight; (d) other physical lights like bulbs, lamps and torches; (e) light of knowledge and insight; (f) light of goodness; (g) Christ, the Light; (h) God as Light. The readings can give us insights into what, really, is darkness and what/who is/are light(s). The 2nd and 3rd readings are particularly rich for reflection upon this.

Three Scriptural Signposts:

1. Scene One: The gospel begins with Jesus seeing "a man blind from birth": a natural blindness/darkness, very similar to that at the start of creation [Gen 1:1] when "darkness covered" the earth. A drama begins to unfold—with the disciples, true to the Hebrew tradition of Jesus' time—asking: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus rubbishes this karma-like 'theory of retribution' (which was widely held in those times) by not engaging into theological speculation but rather by telling his disciples: "Neither! but that God's works might be revealed in him" (v.4). With this answer, Jesus locates the whole event onto the larger landscape of a worker-God "who sent me, [Jesus]," and adds, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (v.5). Darkness will soon be dispelled with God's 'Son-light' in and through whom, things will be illumined. Interestingly, Jesus does not work the miracle with some sleight-of-the hand trick; but, just as the worker-God of Genesis [chapter 2] moulds Adam out of mud, Jesus "made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which means 'Sent'). Then he went and washed and came back able to see" (vv.6-7). Through divine intervention and human cooperation, the congenital blindness of a beggar is cured. He sees light. Having been 'sent' by 'The One Sent by God' [Jn 3:17,34; 5:36], the once-blind beggar is 'sent' to evangelize those who believe that they can see, but who, in due time, Jesus proves to be blind guides wallowing in darkness.
2. Scene Two: From Jesus, the disciples and the blind beggar, the spotlight now moves over to the Pharisees. Obviously amazed at the miraculous healing of the blind beggar, friends, neighbours and family jump into the fray to discuss matters—very much like you and I—curious to know the Who, When, Where and How of things. Rather than spending time for gratitude and celebration, the beggar is forced to answer a barrage of questions. When he says, "I do not know" he is brought before the Pharisees, the holiest and wisest of the flock! Sadly, rather than move forward from attesting a miraculous healing to giving praise to God, they move backward, seeking answers in their laws, rules and traditions. The Pharisees condemn Jesus' healing-miracle on several counts: (a) it was done on a Sabbath; (b) by making paste from saliva Jesus was 'making medicine' since spittle was considered medicinal; (c) they wondered 'how' anyone could get healed in the Pool of Siloam since the Jews refused its water [see Isa 8:6]; and, most importantly, (d) they were afraid that this miracle would draw the masses towards Jesus, thereby weakening their influence over

them. Consequently, they threaten the blind-man's parents who "fear the Jews who had agreed to expel from the synagogue anyone who acknowledged Jesus as the Christ" (v.22). This 'excommunication' could reflect the situation around 90 AD when Christians were formally excommunicated from synagogues [see Jn 12:42; 16:2]. Thus, John would be exhorting them to follow Jesus faithfully. Such hypotheses notwithstanding, towards the end of this episode, the Pharisees seem blinder than they ever were before.

3. **Scene Three:** runs like a thread throughout the long gospel passage with the blind beggar as a hero. He progresses not only from physical darkness (blindness) to light, but his 'eyes of faith' too are opened in his progressive declaration of who the miraculous healer is. He first refers to him as: "The man called Jesus" (v.11). Second, he comes to greater clarity and insight as he declares that, "He is a prophet" (v.17). Finally, third, he says: "Lord, I believe," in answer to Jesus' query: "Do you believe in the Son of Man?". This is followed by a supreme act of adoration: "And he worshiped him" (v.38). From his congenital blindness and darkness, he is re-created into a new creature, a disciple of Christ, with his physical and spiritual blindness totally cured.

From darkness to light in the 2nd reading: Paul's letter to the Ephesians again highlights the symbolism of light-darkness suggestive of a baptismal context (see 1:13-14; 2:1-6; 4:22-24). The popular Judaic symbol of light is Christianized with a verse from an early Christian hymn: "Awake from your sleep, arise from the dead, Christ will give you light" (v.14).

From darkness to light in the 1st reading: Though it is usually easier to find a link between the 1st reading and the gospel, today's first reading from the First Book of Samuel does not easily provide such a link. However, the line "The Lord sees not as man; man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart" can be used to stress quite literally the Divine 'insight' which runs deep. Further, Samuel's anointing of David as king with oil can be seen as signifying a new life, which has baptismal overtones in the later traditions. Also note that the washing at the Pool of Siloam could have baptismal references since in the early Church, baptism was known as 'illumination' (*photismos*).

An Insight from Church Tradition in Times of the Corona Virus Threat: St Corona (died approx. 170 AD) was martyred because of her faith in Christ. When her brother-in-law St Victor was being tortured for professing his love for Christ and his eyes were being gouged out, Corona was beside him, encouraging him to remain faithful to Christ. He did. Corona literally became Victor's eyes, so to say, telling him to keep his sight on Christ. She was later arrested and martyred, her body being ripped apart by untying two bent palm trees to which she was fastened.

A Guiding Light: Seeking to be of assistance to a blind woman who prayed for long hours in his church, a priest once asked her: "Ma'am, can I be of some help to you to see something?" Very politely, the blind woman replied, "No, thank you, Father, I have enough of light within me to see the things that are most important to me and to life, at large."May we look at reality with the God's eyes, as we pray, "From darkness, Lord, lead us to You, The Light!"
