

Fourth Sunday of Lent, A (Scrutiny) – March 26, 2017 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham, Ala. – 5pm Vigil, 8:30 & 11am Sunday Masses – 745 words

We naturally tend to think that our perception of a situation or our outlook on an issue is the correct one. People will often say, “That’s how I see things”, and what they really mean is, “That’s how it is”. But the truth is that often we are rather blind. We judge by appearances; we cannot see into the hearts of other people. Thus the prophet Samuel tells us in the first reading today, “Not as man sees does God see, because man sees the appearance, but the Lord looks into the heart”. Does this mean that we are destined to roam the face of the earth blind to what is good, righteous, and true? There are some people who would say “yes” – that life is ultimately a joke, and the joke is on us. They would say that we are going nowhere but to self-destruction.

The son of God came, however, to contradict this moral or spiritual darkness. “I am the light of world”, he says in John’s gospel. And in today’s passage he says, “Go wash in the pool of Siloam’ – which means Sent”. If we go and wash in the waters of baptism and grace, we come back able to see. We come back able to see with the eyes of faith. “One thing I know is that I was blind and now I see”, said the man born blind. He received his physical sight for the first time. Then, he would come to see Jesus Christ and believe in him, thus gaining spiritual sight also.

When we are spiritually blind, we judge the commandments of God to be restrictions on our freedom. “Remember the Sabbath”; “you shall not commit adultery”; “you shall not bear false witness”; – commandments that cramp one’s style and allegedly limit one’s freedom, even if the planned use of that freedom is for doing evil. But when we see – when we have spiritual sight, living faith – then we see the commandments of God as liberating. We become more honest, more generous, and more faithful; we learn to love. New vistas of freedom open before us, as we direct our will to what is good and makes us fully alive.

How is it, then, that we can “go and wash”? We have already been baptized: How can we be renewed by the living waters of God’s grace? We heard about that living water last week, in the account of the Woman at the Well. For her to receive the living water, it involved her encountering the truth about who she was. And for her to see who she was, she had to have an encounter with Christ, who shone his light into her heart. For us, to “go and wash” begins with having a daily encounter with the Lord in prayer – and even better if that prayer takes place in a church or chapel, before the Lord’s Real Presence. It’s one of the reasons why making a daily visit to the Blessed Sacrament has always been recommended by the saints: it’s an opportunity for grace, for daily renewal.

Wherever we encounter the Lord in prayer, he will help us gradually to see more clearly who we are and who he wants us to become. He loves us as we are; but he does not wish for us to stay as we are, for he has something greater in mind for each one of us. He wants us to realize our full potential, and to live out his unique plan for the happiness of each one of us. This weekend, roughly halfway through Lent now, St. Paul tells us in the second reading, “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light”. Leave behind your old ways: seek more fully the life of Christ. We do so each day in our efforts at conversion – in carrying out our Lenten sacrifices and resolutions – and in our communion with the Lord in prayer.

Our psalm response today was, “The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.” Christ comes to meet us; he walks with us. He also sends us – “go and wash” – to be continually renewed by his grace and so realize the fullness of our calling. For many of us, our physical sight is failing. But we pray that for all of us, our spiritual sight may ever grow in clarity, until we see our Lord Jesus Christ face to face in heaven.