

Fourth Sunday of Lent, A (Scrutiny) – March 10, 2018 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham, Ala. – 5pm Vigil, 8:30 & 11am Sunday Masses – 600 words

The parable of the man born blind is such a beautiful scene, recorded only in the Gospel of John. But all the readings this Sunday have to do with the theme of sight. In the first reading, Samuel has the task of choosing the next king for Israel, and he wants to do so based on appearance. But God has someone particular in mind, and reminds Samuel that “not as man sees does God see”. In the second reading, St. Paul speaks about the light of God which makes the good and the bad visible in our lives, exhorting us, then, to walk always in that light. And the famous psalm 23 sings of the “dark valley” – this world in which we live – where at times it is hard to see the right path, but that the Lord is there to guide us through it. Indeed, we could sum up our reading’s themes with two words: sight and light.

The gospel, however, merits a further comment. It is not only the man born blind who has a vision problem, but also the Pharisees: the light of Christ was shining right before them, as it were, yet they could not see it – indeed, refused to see it. They had a profound spiritual blindness, caused and fed by things like their pride, their desire to be the ones in charge and in control, their prejudices, their envy. Christ was a threat to them, not because he intended them any harm – which clearly he did not – but because they thought he might take something of value from them. This is the primordial suspicion with which we all struggle at times: namely, that if we surrender to God’s way, we might not end up fully happy; maybe it is better to pursue our own way instead. This was the temptation that the serpent brought to Adam and Eve in the beginning!

Against this temptation St. Paul says, “Live as children of the light, for light produces every kind of goodness and righteousness and truth... ‘Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light’.” We know that the path of spiritual blindness leads only to a deeper darkness; in our heart of hearts, we do wish to live in the light. So we must ask the Lord to wake us up, to heal our vision, to help us to see those things that make us blind; and then, to have the courage to accept his help, for he wishes to liberate us. Those who are old enough to remember, think of Pope St. John Paul II’s great exhortation at the beginning of his papacy, “Open wide the doors to Christ!”. Pope Benedict made that a theme of his pontificate also, and I will conclude my brief reflection with his words. The Holy Father, speaking about this friendship with Jesus – this walking in the light – said:

‘Open wide the doors [to] Christ!’... If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing,... absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great... Only in this friendship are the doors of life opened wide. Only in this friendship is the great potential of human existence truly revealed. Only in this friendship do we experience beauty and liberation. And so, today, with great strength and great conviction,... I say to you...: Do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away, and he gives you everything. When we give ourselves to him, we receive a hundredfold in return. Yes, open, open wide the doors to Christ – and you will find true life. Amen.¹

¹ Homily at the Mass for the beginning of the Petrine Ministry, 24 April 2005;
https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2005/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20050424_inizio-pontificato.html.