

Fourth Sunday of Lent. Year (A) – Optical Illusion

I remember the first time I went to a carnival as a child, I entered an attraction called the maze with one of my older cousins. I remember being nervous because I had heard stories about the maze being very difficult, being scary, hearing that there were kids that didn't make it out, but I wanted to be brave and show that I could do it. As I went into the maze, I remember it was dark, I couldn't see my hand in front of me, I started questioning my decision to enter, I was trying to feel around to see if I got to a wall, but I wasn't having any luck, the floor was uneven, and I felt like I was going up and down. I got a slight glimpse of a light from a far, so I proceeded towards it, I guess it was another room as when I turned around, I saw a reflection, but it was my reflection in a mirror, this new room was full of mirrors. I felt trapped, **everything I was able to see was an optical illusion, it was there to deceive me**, I felt like I was there for hours, I was starting to get nervous, I started sweating, I heard kids crying, I heard screaming, I was becoming a mess. Then my older cousin who I had no idea where he had gone, came grabbed my hand and said follow me, I followed along, and he got me out of the maze. I have not been a huge fan of mazes since then.

Today is the fourth Sunday of Lent also known as Laetare Sunday. It is meant to give us a pause in the Lenten season. It is meant to give us a moment of rejoicing and hope as we look ahead to Easter. **Why do we need a moment of rejoicing or pause?** I believe we need a moment of pause because lent is challenging. Lent can be described as a time journeying through the desert. We entered the desert with Jesus and our goal is to come out of the desert being a little more Christlike. **Why a desert?** A desert is a place of testing, a place that tests your character, your inner being, your limits. Deserts are places of extremes, it could be extremely hot, or extremely cold, it could be extremely dry, or you can have extreme winds. All these variances and conditions truly test our journey through a desert. Aside from the extremes, one desert phenomenon that has always intrigued me are mirages. **Mirages are optical illusions, is when you believe you see something, but you are seeing something different.** These mirages are a result of the different temperatures in the desert along with the lighting and reflections. In other words, what you see, might not be what it is. Journeying through the desert of life during lent becomes difficult for us because we are visual beings, our normal tendency is to walk by sight and by what we perceive to be right.

In today's readings our Lord is encouraging us not to fall to the mirages, not to fall to the optical illusions but to see as he sees. The first reading tells us the story of Samuel anointing King David. Samuel was judging by the appearances of Jesse's son, but the Lord tells him that he looks into the heart. In other words that we shouldn't focus on the visual, we shouldn't focus on the appearance or perceptions. Samuel was probably looking for a strong warrior, someone to represent the army, someone to represent Israel, someone who would cause fear in the enemy's army, and I don't blame him because I would be looking for the same thing, but God was looking for something different.

In the gospel Jesus shares the amazing story of the man born blind. People saw the man blind and immediately the perception was that either he was a sinner, or his parents were sinners. Our perception is that if there is something that we consider bad is a result of something bad that we have done or someone around us has done. This is the perception that leads us to question **why do bad things happen to good people?** Because in our eyes, in our minds, in our perception we can't reconcile bad things happening to good people. Even though we might not voice the question, there are many times that interiorly we might wonder why, **why do certain things which we might perceive as bad happen to people who we feel do not deserve it?**

Today's gospel might offer us one way of looking at that question. In the gospel, Jesus answers his disciples by stressing that neither the blind man nor his parents sinned, that the reason why he was blind was **so that the works of God might be made visible through him.** In other words what we might consider bad things happening to good people, might not be bad things in the grand scheme of things. Like Samuel we might be judging based on appearances, we judge based on what we can see, but our sight is limited. We can only see what is in front of us, or what has happened we can't see the future or how actions are interrelated, yet God sees all at once, he sees our past, present, future and how all our actions are interrelated. The blind man was able to see and the miracle of his sight, potentially made many see the power, glory of Jesus, who otherwise might not have. What seemed to have been a negative, a bad thing (his blindness), turned out to be much bigger than the blind man.

So, what do you see? Are you walking through the desert of lent, struggling to make it to the end? Have you been encountering optical illusions and mirages, where you think you see something but reality is different. Our Lord is telling us today that he is the light of the world, that through him we will be able to see better, that our sight will be adjusted so that we can walk by faith and not by sight. As I was lost, confused, nervous and perplexed in the maze I remember my older cousin grabbing my hand and saying follow me, he walked me out of my despair and into the light. As we are navigating this desert journey, *today's psalm says... 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.* It reminds us that we are not alone in this journey, we are not alone in this desert, even if we feel alone or can't see.

The greatest mirage that we will encounter in the desert is the inability to see as God sees. As we get closer to the end of this Lenten season, let us continue the journey **asking our Lord to remove the mirages, to remove the optical illusions but to help us see as he sees. Let us ask him to send us to the Pool of Siloam so that we can see ourselves as he sees us, that we get to see others as he sees others, and to help us, see our most difficult challenge as he sees them.**