

Homily by Deacon Jim Olshefski

4th Sunday of Lent

March 19, 2023

Congratulations to one and all; we're halfway through this Lenten season of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Today, the Fourth Sunday of Lent, commonly known as Laetare Sunday, is the traditional mid-point of Lent. It's also the middle of the three Scrutiny rites in which we publicly celebrate the Catechumens, the Elect, who will join the Church through baptism and confirmation at the Easter Vigil. We celebrate that they're coming to know the same Jesus around whom our faith community is formed; the same Jesus we ourselves are still-coming-to-know. The Scrutinies focus on the symbols of **water, light** and **life**:

- Last week, we heard Jesus provide **living water** to the Samaritan woman.
- Next week, we will hear of Jesus, the resurrection and the **life**, who raises Lazarus from the dead.
- While this week we heard the story of Jesus, the **light** of the world, who gives sight to the man born blind.

In today's first reading from the First Book of Samuel, we heard of the process through which God chose David, the shepherd, to become the King of Israel. Samuel didn't see the light; he was blind to God's plan. If not for God's guidance, Samuel would not have chosen David; he would have chosen one of the other seven older sons of Jesse. For "not as man sees does God see; ...man sees the appearance but the Lord looks into the heart." In this case, Samuel was "spiritually blind." To be "spiritually blind" means to **hear the truth, but not see what it means**. The "spiritually blind" cannot see God's "big picture" of salvation, and how it applies to their own lives. They have difficulty believing what they cannot see; they are simply unable to understand God's Word. And that's the situation in today's Gospel.

After being healed by Jesus, the physically blind man, sees the light—both literally and figuratively—and recognizes Jesus as the "Son of Man" with his response, "I do believe, Lord." On the other hand, the spiritually blind Jews, Pharisees and neighbors alike, refuse to see God's wonderful work in Jesus; they fail to recognize that Jesus came from God; therefore, they remain in the dark.

Such spiritual blindness afflicts people, all of us, in many ways:

- **When we are blind to God's goodness in our own lives.** We fail to count our blessings but only count our woes. We see the glass half-empty; rather than half-full.
- **When we're blind to God's good gifts in others.** All we recognize is the wrong and continually criticize. We're not satisfied with what is available; rather, we're more concerned about what is lacking.
- **When we're blind to those in need and fail to help when our help is sorely needed.** Just like, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, the priest and the Levite who passed by the man who was left near dead by robbers.
- **When we're blind to our own faults.** We don't accept responsibility for our actions and, with a "holier than thou" attitude, insist fault lies with others.
- **When we're blinded by vices** such as pride, greed, wrath, envy, lust, gluttony and sloth, otherwise known as the seven deadly sins.

In all of these situations, we're blinded by the darkness and fail to see the light of God's will.

To overcome spiritual blindness in whatever form, which afflicts us all to one degree or another, we need to heed the words of St. Paul in today's letter to the Ephesians, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light," then we'll "live as children of light"..."produc[ing] every kind of goodness and righteousness and truth." Through our baptism and being continually refreshed by the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist and Reconciliation, we will see the light just like the blind man.