

Dcn. Jerry's Homily for March 19, 2023 Fourth Sunday of Lent

I am personally interested in physical blindness. A number of years ago my niece, my goddaughter, went blind over the course of a month. I heard some discussion about this genetic defect over time which is called Lebers disease. It turns out that my mother and her sisters all carried this defective gene and since finding out that my niece went blind, a first cousin and more than a handful of second cousins have gone blind, one just last month. There is no cure for this disease. Because it passes through the mother, I could still go blind from this disease. Consequently, I repeat the Novena to St. Lucy, protector of eyes every nine days not only for myself but for all those in my family suffering from this disease.

In today's Gospel Jesus demonstrates His divinity by curing the man born blind. But it is also about faith. The Gospel contrasts the man born blind who could see that Jesus was the Son of God and therefore could accept the cure. He could see that this was God's work. The Pharisees could not see with their hearts. They had no faith. There is this interesting story that unfolds. They can see the man born blind but could not see God's hand in his cure. They question his parents. The parents assure them he was born blind but they want no part in acknowledging Jesus's real presence as the Christ. If they did, they would be expelled from the synagogue. They hid what they knew was true, they acted as if they were blind to the facts because they were afraid. But the man who had been blind could now see with his eyes and more importantly could also see with his heart. He even teases the Pharisees. Do you want to become his follower? The Pharisees were spiritually blind.

I am personally interested in spiritual blindness. Growing up in the 60s and early 70s this was a quite natural reaction to the civil rights movement and anti-war movement. I was fairly conservative but to try to make people think that clothing or hair styles did not define a person I had fairly long hair and a fairly long beard. Yes, I had a different look back then. At any rate I tended bar during summer breaks and one evening a leading citizen of the community was sitting at the bar with his wife and said, "Jer, can I ask you a question? You lector at Church, you work hard, you go to a good Catholic university, Marquette. Why do you have that beard and long hair. You look ugly with that." I was shocked at the question but before I could say anything his wife angrily turned to him and said, "How do you know what he looks like? You are blind!" I believe he lost his sight in an industrial accident. Here was a blind man making a comment about appearance, maybe he was both physically and spiritually blind. Now he was generally a good man. He volunteered for various civic functions. In fact he was the head of the umpires for the little league. Believe me. I could not make that up.

But his physical blindness just highlighted his bigotry, his spiritual blindness, his attitude toward young people and their beliefs.

In one of the Gospel's last week, Jesus stated, "A house divided against itself cannot stand." Abraham Lincoln paraphrased this line in a speech 1858 the night before he was nominated to run for the US Senate. A campaign that propelled him onto the national stage and two years later to the presidency and our Civil War.

In many ways each of us has a blind spot in our hearts. But they are not the same blind spot and so like the Pharisee in today's Gospel we search for truth even though God provided a miracle that is right in front of us to show us what God wants us to do.

Each of us has different blind spots and as a result we have greater divisions in our nation than at any time in my lifetime.

Today's Gospel has a valuable lesson for each of us, a miraculous cure for our blindness, spiritual or otherwise.

Like the man born blind we need to see what Christ is doing in our lives. We need to see what Christ is doing in the world. After the man was harassed and questioned by the Pharisees, Jesus comes to him. Do you believe in the Son of Man?

Christ is asking each of us that question. Do you believe in the Son of Man? Hopefully we will each say yes with our lips, our voice. But will we also say yes with our heart and our actions.

There are certain objective truths. Do we accept those truths, do we proclaim that God is first in our hearts? Do we act as if he is the most important thing in our life? Do we love our neighbor as ourselves? Then we will pass Christ's judgment. But if we choose not to see then we blind ourselves. Will there be consequences?

~Dcn. Jerry