



March 10, 2013

Fourth Sunday of Lent

Jesus replied to them, "If you were blind there would be no sin in that. 'But we see,' you say and so your sin remains."

John 9:41

NOTE: We continue our readings from Sunday Cycle A (we are in Cycle C this year) with the focus on the Gospel of John. The reason for this is the presence of the elect (those preparing for Christian Initiation). These weeks are meant to teach us about the meaning of our baptism. And so we reflect on them as we pray over and prepare our elect for initiation and prepare ourselves for the renewal of our baptismal promises.

Dear Friends;

There is a saying, "There are none so blind, as those who refuse to see." Often I think that we believe seeing to be a passive and objective activity. However, the data do not bear this out. Police and the legal system both know that the least reliable form of evidence are eye-witnesses. If there are a group of eye-witnesses they often see different and conflicting things. Police, district attorneys and defense lawyers would rather have other forms of evidence such as DNA samples. The witnesses are used only to corroborate the scientific data.

The reason for this is our vision is so subjective. Our vision is colored by our personal experiences. We often do not see what is right in front of us. Have you ever looked for something like your keys? You look all around every room in the house only later to discover they were right in front of you all the time? Seeing is not something that we do only with our eyes it is something that goes on inside of us. Sometimes we are blind to things. Sometimes we see only what we want to see.

We can train our vision. That is what the visual arts are meant to do. When I was at the California College of the Arts all the classes were really exercises in expanding one's vision. We learned to look at the body, nature, still life arrangements, architecture, color, shape, light and dark, the thicknesses of lines. All this was meant to help us see well. So we could communicate better. That was the point. Art was not about making things pretty but helping others to see and understand the world in a new way.

This is exactly what Jesus is trying to do. He wants to train our vision. He wants us to see our way to the reign of God. We must see its inclusiveness, its preferential favor to the least and marginalized; its forgiveness and its radical love. And learning to see as Jesus does takes training and focus—it is a process of conversion. This is the point of our Gospel story. The blind man comes slowly to recognize who Jesus is. First, he does not know him, then he defends him against the judgments of the Pharisees and declares him as a prophet, finally he comes to know Jesus as Savior, Lord and light of the world. And in recognition falls down and worships him.

The Pharisees however refuse to change their minds or expand their vision. They have already decided that those who are at the margins, those who are poor and afflicted are that way because of something these people did to deserve it. Does this not sound like many in our country when they speak of the poor—those who need assistance with food, housing and health care?

Where Jesus saw an opportunity for the reign of God to break through, the Pharisees saw people who deserved condemnation. We see what we want to see. Jesus invites us to his way of seeing. We must like the man born blind move from the darkness of our ignorance and sin to the light of Jesus' radical love. The choice is ours. Through Baptism we have chosen to take on Jesus' perspective. This is why in the early Church they would sometimes refer to Baptism in Greek as "*photismos*" that is "illumination." Jesus lights up our minds and hearts and we see the whole world differently.

Blessed John Henry Newman (Cardinal Newman) wrote a Poem called "Lead, Kindly Light." There he builds on this idea that we don't know or see clearly. There is much darkness. We need the inspiring light of God to keep us on the way that leads to light. We need that light one step at a time:

Lead, kindly light...Lead thou me on;
The night is dark, and I am far from home,
Lead thou me on...
I do not ask to see
The distant scene; one step enough for me.

Peace,

Fr. Ron