

The Fourth Sunday of Lent

March 2, 2008

1 Samuel 16:1-13

Psalm 23

Ephesians 5:8-14

John 9:1-41

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

There is a special darkness, the pre-dawn darkness after a long night, a darkness that descends as the stars fade away, after the moon has set, and no light at all penetrates the night. The night winds die away. The small sounds of the night, the rustlings and stirrings, cease. Then there is a profound sense of isolation, of being utterly and completely alone.

Of course, we have all the images of days and years past, days and years of light and color, blues and greens and reds, and the faces of ones we love, visual memories to cast light into those moments.

What if we had no such images, no such memories, what then? Such was the man born blind in this morning's Gospel. Could he imagine, could he dream? Could he fill that deep, deep darkness in which he lived?

The dawn of a dark night comes slowly, gradually, unfolding for those who can see. There is a lightening of the darkness of the sky, grayness and a slow revelation of clouds and trees and the world about us. Then a flash of fire in the east, clouds made pink, then orange, then flaming red, and then the rising sun, long shafts of

golden light breaking the last pall of night, dispelling the darkness, and it is a new day.

Was it so very different for the man imprisoned in the blindness of his birth? Of course, there were no tones of gray, no slow spreading of light. There was just the sudden revelation, the fiery flash of a vision of a world which he had never seen, never known.

Are we still talking about a physical blindness? There is another kind of blindness, spiritual blindness. Perhaps that's the real point of this story. Perhaps we are talking about a man who has never confronted, perhaps never heard of, Jesus Christ. Such people are legion. They aren't exactly sinners, they aren't really evil, they simply do not know what it means to be in the presence of Christ, to have Him in their lives, and never having known Him, they simply don't miss Him. They live in a true spiritual darkness, unrelieved by the vision of a different, better life. They just don't know what they're missing.

The blind man in this Gospel is just such a person. He doesn't ask Jesus to give him sight; he doesn't know what sight is. For him life is perpetual darkness, cold and hard; it always has been, and it always will be. He doesn't call out. It's Jesus that reaches out to him; it's Jesus who touches his eyes and opens them to a new and brighter world.

He doesn't know who Jesus is; he doesn't even care. All he knows is that he has received, without even asking, an incomparable gift, a new life.

That is the way it happens. If we just let Jesus come close, let Him touch us, we will be made whole and new no matter what darkness we carry about; we will be changed forever. "Once we have been in darkness" and darkness comes in many forms, but now that we have received His touch, "in the Lord we are light."

That's not all. The newly-sighted man, running about telling everyone about this incredible gift, finds himself in a world of doubters and cynics. He finds himself in the company of people who would deny his healing, throttle his joy, and reduce him to a life of darkness again. But they can't. No matter how critical, mean, and hard they may be, he has the one, perfect answer, the only answer. "One thing I do know: that I was blind, and now I see." Is there need for him to say more; is there need for us to say more?

I don't think the man was driven from the company of the doubters. He was too joyful, too spirit-filled to care what they said. I think he left to find the one who had given him sight, and he found Him. And his words and our words and the words of all who have ever known the presence of Jesus and felt His touch, who have been made whole by Him are, "Lord, I believe."

In His Holy Name.