

St Mary's Concord

A Reflection for the Fourth Sunday of Lent

This reflection is based on the homily preached by Fr Paul Crowley on the readings for the Fourth Sunday of Lent in Year A: 1 Samuel 16:1, 6-7,10-13; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41

The story of human suffering has been retold time and time again in human history and very often it has been depicted as a battle between light and darkness. For many people the upheaval caused by the COVID19 pandemic has been overwhelming.

No matter how secure we may think we are, we cannot help but be affected by the constant anxiety and concern that is all around us. Our anxiety is all the greater because the world has become a global village and we can see instantly what is happening in Italy, Spain, Britain and many other places.

The challenge facing us is real. Many people are suffering not only because of the virus but also because of the social and economic upheaval that the pandemic has caused. So how do we find light in the darkness? What gives us hope?

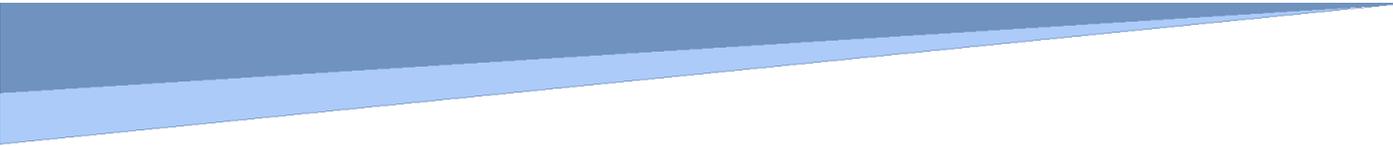
Today's Gospel does not offer a solution to this international crisis but it does invite us to pause and reflect on our response. The opening scene in chapter 9 of John's Gospel places Jesus and his disciples in Jerusalem for the feast of Tabernacles where they come across a man who had been born blind. The disciples ask the obvious question: why is this man suffering?

In their worldview suffering was a punishment from God and so they ask Jesus, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" And as we have seen, in John's Gospel such questions are an invitation for us to explore a deeper reality. The encounter that follows is about light and darkness and it is about those who see clearly and those who are blind.

In fact, it is made up of two interwoven stories: the healing of a blind man and the story of those who think they can see but are in fact blind. Holding those stories together is Jesus who declares that he is the Light of the World, the one who will overcome the darkness.

As the story unfolds we begin to understand that this is not about physical blindness, it is about how we come to see with the eyes of faith. The encounter between Jesus and the blind man echoes last Sunday's encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well. The man is never given a name, he is always called "the man who was blind" and in that sense he is all humanity. He is every woman and man who is seeking light in the darkness.

He does not even ask to be healed. Jesus takes the initiative and anoints his eyes with clay and tells him to go and wash off the clay in the Pool of Siloam, which we are told means "Sent". And immediately we understand that this is also about Baptism and the Mission entrusted to those who are baptised.



We also need to recall that the context is the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot) a pilgrimage festival that recalled the Exodus journey from Egypt when the people lived in tents. The feast of Tabernacles was about the need to trust in God when things were happening in the wilderness that they could not understand.

After he washes in the Pool of Siloam the man can see but it takes him some time to understand what has happened. His faith evolves like that of the Samaritan woman. When he is questioned, he first says “The man Jesus told me to wash.” Later he calls Jesus a prophet and finally when Jesus seeks him out after he is expelled from the community he declares, “Lord, I believe.”

Meanwhile those who refuse to believe spiral deeper into the darkness and it is not just the pharisees but all who reject the light. They fail to see because they have tunnel vision. They know the Law of Moses, or at least they think they do. They think they know how God works but when they are confronted by a fact that does not fit their view of God they refuse to see.

We all have our prejudices that can blind us from seeing the truth even when it is right in front of us. If someone we dislike does something worthwhile, we either dismiss what they did or we question their motives. If we do open our eyes, there are consequences. The blind man says to the Jewish leaders, “Do you want to become his disciples?”

Sometimes we choose not to see because if we open our eyes, we will be presented with things that we are not prepared to accept. To see with the eyes of faith is to choose to follow the Light.

Early each morning during the feast the priests and the pilgrims went out through the eastern gate of the city away from the Temple and at sunrise they turned their backs to the rising sun and faced the Temple and declared “Our eyes are turned towards the Lord.”

In John’s Gospel Jesus is the way to the Father and declares that he is the Light of the World. And so this story is not about the healing of a blind man, it is about what it means to believe in Jesus even when things are happening around us that we struggle to understand.

Where do we turn to find the Light in the midst of the darkness?

Paul Crowley
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