

Homily for the
4th SUN. in LENT "A"
March 21-22, 2009

The healing of blindness has been preached in Lent for almost as long as the church has lived. As the days begin to lengthen towards more and more sunlight, we are reminded that these are Lenten days, and we are urged to let more and more light into our lives.

The Easter baptisms were once called "*photismos*" 'enlightenment', 'letting in the light'. We keep this symbol alive in the blessing of new fire, the **paschal candle**, the candles given to the newly baptized and to all the faithful at the Easter Vigil. In the light of Jesus Christ we have the ability to see things in a new way. We begin to look at realities, not just images or outward appearance, with the light of Christ, we are able to look at the heart of things.

This new and different vision is the one the Lord urged upon Samuel the day he went to Bethlehem to offer sacrifice and find a new leader for the nation. Never mind about appearances, look beyond the public relations image. Because God looks at the soul and into the heart.

Even the disciples have trouble with their seeing at first: "*Rabbi, who sinned,*" they ask, "*this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?*" Blindness was associated with sinfulness and the disciples are looking for a place to lay the blame.

Jesus urges them to look for opportunities, ways to put a new way of seeing into practice. Don't see people as sinners, see them as brothers and sisters needing the pool of

Siloam, the bath of forgiveness, healing and acceptance that is "sent" from the ocean of God's love. Who to point the finger at or who to pin the blame on are not the issue, the real issue is that we see in a new way, so that the work of God might be made more clear.

Jesus moistens clay with his own saliva (an old-fashioned remedy) applies it to the eyes of the man born blind, then, sends him off to the sacred pool to wash. He comes back, able to see. Sort of. It's not complete. He knows he's able to see, but he doesn't know where to look, he doesn't know where Jesus fits into all this yet.

"Where is he?" the neighbors ask him. "I don't know," he answers. The act of baptism doesn't complete our own illumination, either. Neither does confirmation, or even ordination. St. Paul reminds us that children of light must walk in the light. It's not enough just to see images and appearances. We are to walk in what is good, right and true, and to continue to learn. A personal commitment needs to be made; the gifts need to be accepted and put to use.

Those whose lives have been profoundly changed are often seen as strangers by others who do not share the light of Jesus. They still persist in the common blindness, which was described when this man first began to see. Even his parents distance themselves. "We know our son, and we know he was born blind." It is risky for them to be involved with this radical change in him. They fear the punishment of authorities who threaten excommunication to anyone who acknowledges Jesus. And so they say "Go talk to him about it!"

There are many forms of blindness described in the Gospel. There is the blindness of faithful disciples, who

speak in trite religious slogans, and see illness in terms of blame and shame. There is the blindness of neighbors, and family, who distance themselves from the light of Jesus ministry, out of discomfort or fear. There is the blindness of the professionals in religion who could not see that anything good could happen outside their own opinionated system of thinking.

The dark confusing blindness that is described in this Gospel is very much like society today. But it was in the midst of that muddled confusion that the man born blind (who is meant to symbolize all of us) is healed, given sight, and is able to see the Truth.

Even though he did not know where Jesus was, and the blindness of those around him made them useless, it is Jesus who finds *him* and confronts him with the need to make a personal commitment of faith in the one who gives him vision.

We have all washed in the Pool of Siloam, when we were Baptized. We were all given a share in the new vision which comes from the light of Christ. But we do not see clearly yet. The more we come into contact with Jesus, the more clearly we can see the truth about our purpose and our value here.

As we journey through Lent, and encounter Christ in Prayer, in the Sacraments, and especially in the Eucharist, we should be experiencing brighter and brighter days. I hope that as we prepare to celebrate and support the commitment that the Catechumens will make this Easter, that is, to embrace the Light of Jesus, and walk in the light, I hope that we too, will recommit ourselves to see with the eyes of faith, and continue to be a source of direction,

guidance and strength for those who still stumble in blindness.