

4th Sun Lent A... Blind Man

Introduction...

Today's Gospel is a wonderful story of darkness and light, spiritual blindness and the gradual awakening of spiritual sight. Once again we focus on a long dialogue – but this time the main character is a blind man. But Jesus reminds us at the beginning of the story...

Refrain... I am the Light of the world.

I The Gospel

In the second reading Paul challenges the Christians at Ephesus:

Brothers and sisters: You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light. Light produces every kind of goodness and righteousness and truth.

In the Gospel Jesus encounters a person born blind... Jesus gives him sight. As the story unfolds it focuses on the one who now sees, the blind man who lived in darkness and now lives in the light, the light of Christ awakening and developing in this man's life... And notice, this awakening and developing of spiritual insight into who Jesus really is... this takes place in the midst of hard questioning, mounting ridicule, and finally physical expulsion from the presence of the so-called "insightful" religious leaders of Jesus' time.

Notice how the spiritual insight into the light of Christ grows in the experience of the man born blind.

At first his friends ask him how he came to see. He says "*the man they call Jesus*" healed me.

When the Pharisees begin to sharply question him he calls Jesus "*a prophet.*" As the Pharisees continue to grill him he describes Jesus as a "*devout*" Jew who obeys God, and as a "*man from God.*"

After the Pharisees "*bodily throw him out*" of their presence Jesus finds him and lovingly speaks to him. Jesus reveals himself as the "*Son of Man*"... God's special messenger. The Light of the World now shines on this newly enlightened man who exclaims, "*I do believe Lord,*" and he bows down and worships Jesus.

And Jesus said...

Refrain... I am the Light of the world.

II Our World Today

We live in an “enlightened” age,
an age of “lightening fast” information exchange,
and an age of profound seeking for spiritual “enlightenment.”
But we also live in so much fearful darkness,
an age of violence and terrorism,
in what Pope John Paul II called a culture of death.
It’s all around us... read today’s newspaper,
or listen to so many rant and rage talk shows,
or *briefly* check out Jerry Springer on TV.
There seems to be a barbarian meanness in so much of our culture, along
with a skepticism and even cynicism...
under the guise of enlightened self interest and common sense survival.
What I call the “Powers of Darkness” are so very evident...
Where is the light that dispels this darkness?

And Jesus said...

Refrain... I am the Light of the world.

III Our Light

Jesus is our light. We who follow Jesus bring the light of Christ into our
world... that’s our mission.
Jesus brought God’s light into the darkness of his culture,
and reminded people constantly that God’s graciousness and light are
present in our world.
Do we see God’s presence in our world?
Do we bring God’s light into our world?
This requires spiritual enlightenment?

This challenges us to be people of prayer,
who each day lift our minds and hearts to God.
Blessed Mother Theresa described prayer as “making room for God in our
hearts.”
That’s not always easy... we are so busy with our own agenda, our own
worries, our own successes, our own fears.
I believe we need to make time for Jesus every day... it’s called prayer.
Here’s a beautiful story about the simplicity and beauty of prayer – of
drawing close to Jesus, to let his light shine in our hearts each day...

Story... The Empty Chair

The old man's daughter had asked the local priest to come and pray with her father, who was ill and bed-ridden. When the priest arrived he found the man lying in bed with his head propped up on two pillows and an empty chair beside his bed. The priest assumed that the old fellow had been informed of his visit. "I guess you were expecting me," he said.

"No, who are you?" replied the old man.

"I'm the new associate priest at your parish," the priest replied. "When I saw the empty chair, I figured you knew I was going to show up."

"Oh yeah, the chair," said the bed ridden man. "Would you mind closing the door?" Puzzled, the priest shut the door.

"I've never told anyone this, not even my daughter," said the man. "But all of my life I have never known how to pray. At the Sunday Mass I used to hear the priest talk about prayer, but it always went right over my head. I abandoned my attempt at prayer," the old man continued, "til one day, about four years ago, my best friend said to me, 'Joe, prayer is just a simple matter of having a conversation with Jesus. Here's what I suggest. Sit down on a chair, place an empty chair in front of you, and, in faith, see Jesus on that chair. It's not spooky because He promised, 'I'll be with you always.' Then just speak to Him and listen in the same way you're doing with me right now."

'So, Father, I tried it and I've liked it so much that I do it a couple of hours every day. I'm careful though. If my daughter saw me talking to an empty chair, she'd either have a nervous breakdown or send my off to the funny farm."

The priest was deeply moved by the story and encouraged the old man to continue on the journey. Then he prayed with him, anointed him with oil, and returned to the rectory.

Two nights later the daughter called to tell the priest that her dad had died that afternoon. "Did he seem to die in peace?" he asked. "Yes, when I left the house around two o'clock, he called me over to his bedside, told me one of his corny jokes, and kissed me on the cheek. When I got back from the store an hour later, I found him dead. But there was something strange Father. In fact, beyond strange - kinda weird. Apparently, just before daddy died, he leaned over and rested his head on the empty chair beside his bed."

Jesus wants to abide with us, to bring his light into our lives each day. In Paul's beautiful letter to the Christians at Ephesus in which he dwells on what our life as disciples of Jesus means, he prays for these disciples:

...May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith,

May you be rooted and grounded in love...

May you know the love of Christ which surpasses all knowledge

(Eph 3:17,19)

Can we let Christ's light shine in our lives each day through prayer?
Can we become "enlightened" each day through prayer.

We need to spend time each day with Jesus, in prayer.

In the morning say a little morning prayer, offering this day to Jesus, thanking him for this new day, and asking his help during the day.

We need to turn our thoughts and hearts to Jesus briefly during the day, thanking him for the little kindnesses that come our way, or asking his help in time of need.

At meal times we can thank Jesus for the food and refreshment we are blessed with.

At the end of the day we can thank Jesus for the day, ask forgiveness for any thing we've done wrong during the day, and ask for a peaceful rest, assured that we will rest with him at our side during the night.

The early Fathers of the Church spoke about praying seven times a day as a reminder and assistance in keeping the light of Jesus in our lives each day.

If we are spending time with Jesus and getting to know Jesus,
and if we "listen to him" each day,
and allow his light to bath our lives each day,
something begins to happen within our hearts...
within our lives...

we begin to change...
how we view life changes,
how we react to situations changes,
how we treat people changes...

As the light of Christ dawns in our lives each day, it heals our own spiritual blindness...

- we are not so self-centered and self-pampered... because life is not just about us...
- We realize that we don't always have to prove ourselves... because we are loved by God...
- We don't always have to be perfect and have the right answers...because we are not God, but we *are* God's beloved...
- We aren't so burdened by worries and fears so much... because we begin to realize that we are not in charge... God is.
- We become more aware of our own addictions and sinfulness... but now bathed in the healing light of Christ's love.

- We begin to have more peace of mind and heart.

- We become more aware that Jesus, our Good Shepherd, is present at our side each step of our journey, every day.
- Maybe Psalm 23 takes on more meaning for us...

The Lord is my Shepherd...

we might even start off our day with that Psalm.

- How we act each day can also begin to change... not necessarily drastically at first, but with little steps, in small ways...

Jesus heals our own blindness.

His light grows in our life.

And we take that light into the darkness of our world...

Like the person in today's Gospel, we give witness to Jesus.

For Jesus said...

Refrain... I am the Light of the world.

Conclusion

As we continue with this Mass let's ask Christ to continue to bath our hearts in his light,

and to strengthen us to bring his light into our world.

For as Paul says in today's second Reading...

Brothers and sisters: You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light. Light produces every kind of goodness and righteousness and truth.

May the Body and Blood of Christ enlighten us all.

For as Christ said...

Refrain... I am the Light of the world.

N.B. Cultural blindness... blindness toward the poor. Cf. Bill Gates remarks about our economic system being blind to the bottom third of earth's inhabitants because they do not send any economic signals to the economy because of their poverty...

Billions of \$ spent on baldness... less than 10 % of that figure spend on the cure for malaria which kills one million marginalized children a year.