

Fourth Sunday of Lent – Year A
(Mar. 6, 2005)

How Are We Blind?

One of the great quotations from scripture occurs in today's first reading from 1 Samuel. We humans see appearances, but God looks at the heart. We are impressed by the heroes of the world – if indeed there are any heroes left: great athletes, movie stars, popes, politicians. And so, from the opposite point of view, we become terribly disappointed when we discover that, alas, these people are all too human and have clay feet.

To be perfectly honest with you, I find myself much more impressed with the little people who don't seem to be important, who don't put on airs, yet somehow manage to model Christianity in their own unpretentious, yet heroic way. I think of the elderly woman who comes to Mass every day, even in inclement weather. I think of a local business man who spends eight hours a day or more in an unglamorous office and then two nights out of every week acts as a big brother to an inner city kid, helping him with his homework, shooting some hoops in the back yard, or taking him to a ball game. I think of the housebound invalid whose acceptance seems an incredible act of faith. God sees more in the simple, unsung people of our daily life than human criteria would ever admit. But then, God's ways are not our ways.

When the prophet Samuel was sent to anoint a new king, naturally he thought Jesse's eldest son, tall, strong, a natural leader, was the one God wanted. But no he wasn't. Neither was any of the other seven sons that Jesse presented. The one that God chose was the most unlikely of all, a boy, a shepherd boy out in the fields that his father had not called to the meeting because he could hardly be the one that God wanted. And yet he was. Not as we humans see does God see. We look to appearances, but God looks into the heart.

Jesus gives sight to a man born blind. There was nothing exceptional about this man. He was not important. He was poor, a blind beggar, tapping his cane along the street and begging for a bit of food. He didn't even know who Jesus was, and he didn't ask to be cured. But when his eyes

were opened how readily he accepted Jesus. He became an evangelist and took on the unbelieving, blind Pharisees, explaining how Jesus must have come from God. Else how could he do the things he did? He did not hesitate to respond to the formidable opponents. He simply spoke the truth, just as they avoided the truth at all costs. There was too much at stake for them to accept Jesus as the Christ, or simply as someone sent by God, and so they tried to twist the evidence to weaken the faith of the man who had been cured. But he stayed firm, and so Jesus does for him what he did for the Samaritan woman as we heard last week. He reveals who he is. “Do you believe in the Son of Man? Who is he Lord that I may believe in him? He is speaking to you now. I do believe, he said, and bowed down to worship him.”

Jesus reproves the Pharisees because they say they see, but in reality they are blind. As we hear this Gospel today, we must ask ourselves, are we blind or do we really see. Do we see the Lord when we encounter him? Not just here in church where it is relatively easy, but when we leave, in our homes, on our streets, in the marketplace, the places where we play, the places where we weep. Or do we stop at appearances and do not look to the heart? How are we blind? And we ask for the grace to see, to really see.

As far back as the earliest days of the church, the third, fourth and fifth Sundays of Lent have been the occasion when the catechumens are introduced to the mysteries of the faith they will profess at their baptism on Holy Saturday evening, a faith that we heard Jesus offer the Samaritan woman last week and the man born blind today. Today they pray for the light to see, to see – that is, with the eyes of faith – and next week as they contemplate the raising of Lazarus from the dead, they will pray for new life, the new life of baptism.

After their baptism they will be sent forth to evangelize, to tell others about the wonderful things God has done for them, like the Samaritan woman, like the man born blind, like Lazarus. And in the telling they will grow. They will grow in knowledge and love.

Dear friends, these readings are not just for our catechumens and candidates; they are for us as well. As we listen to them on these Sundays we must ask ourselves three questions: “How do we thirst? How are we blind? How are we dead?” And we must sincerely ask the Lord to slake our

thirst, to heal our blindness, and to give us life. It's the gift of God's grace that is freely offered. We have only to open our hearts to receive it. But we must always remember that it's a gift that is not meant to be clutched and hoarded selfishly. It's a gift that grows in us only in the measure that we are willing to share it with others.