

Sunday of the Fourth Week of Lent

Year A

I Sam 16: 1,6-7,10-13

Psalm 23

Eph 5: 8-14

John 9: 1,6-9,13-17,34-38

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Just a few days ago, I was remembering the story of Helen Keller. Keller, whom I consider one of the most outstanding Americans in the twentieth century, was an infant when she contracted a serious illness that left her blind and deaf. Annie Sullivan was hired to teach her. When Helen was 7, thanks to Annie, she had the break through that shaped the rest of her life. Annie took Helen to a faucet and as the water flowed into Helen's hands, Annie signed the word "water" over and over again. The child was able to make the association between the word and the reality. That moment opened the world to Helen and freed her from the darkness and the silent world she had inhabited. Helen's breakthrough at the water, was just the first in a series of breakthroughs for her, and through her, for us.

The story of this brave woman is similar to the story of the blind man from today's Gospel. The healing of the man by Jesus was a break through and the first step in a long process of rejection by others, but at the same time, acceptance and transformation within himself. Like the blind man, very often we live in the darkness of racism and sexism and of so many isms that prevent us to see the light, to see the Christ who lives in the poor and the oppressed, in those we reject and push away from the Table... But Jesus still comes to us! He speaks to us in ways we understand. With something as basic as saliva and dirt he makes mud and he smeared the man's eyes with it and asked him to wash in the pool of Siloam: "the one who has been sent." And his eyes were opened!

In the same way, we have already been washed in the waters of baptism. Our blindness is not permanent for our eyes have already been opened... but like the parents of this man, we are afraid. Throughout our lives we become afraid and very often ashamed of professing Christ not only as the source of our light but as the light itself... and still the Lord touches us and heals us again and again. As the blind man, we also need to go through a conversion process... He first recognized the Lord as "that man they call Jesus," and then as a prophet, and later as "a man from God" and finally "he bows down to worship him" as he recognizes him as Lord. Jesus not only opens his eyes but opens his heart.

In our lives we are called to be disciples, to be followers of Jesus, people who continue the ministry of the Lord... a ministry of forgiveness and reconciliation and healing. We are the ones who beg for light again and again, but we are also the ones who are called to see the Lord in those who are rejected, and oppressed. We are the ones who have been sent. As the blind man, we are called to perceive life with a new light and a new hope. We are called to understand that life is more than asking trivial questions as "who was the one who mixed saliva and mud and cured on the Sabbath." As the blind man, we are called to pay attention to what really matters: "I

was blind but now I see.” As people of faith, we cannot live in darkness, blinded to the expressions of goodness, unable to enjoy that another human being is able to see.

As in the first reading from Samuel, we are admonished not to “judge from appearance or looks or from... lofty stature, because... the Lord with strong light looks into the heart.” As we continue with our celebration of Lent, may we have the courage to look into our own hearts and ask the Lord to purify our eyes so that we also become light in the midst of blind hate, violence and exclusion.