

**4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent: Yr. A – 2020**  
[1 Sm 16:1b,6-7,10-13a · Eph 5:8-14 · Jn 9:1-41]

This weekend is *Laetare* Sunday or the “Sunday of Joy” because we are halfway to Easter. Somehow, it doesn’t feel that way as we see the heroic actions of medical personnel, overwhelmed hospitals, shelter-in-place warnings, economic hardship, and fear. What are we to make of all this? The French priest and philosopher, Pierre de Chardin said, “*The history of the living world can be summarized as the elaboration of ever more perfect eyes . . . in which there is always something more to be seen.*” In other words, God is somehow still at work behind the scenes, we just need to adjust our spiritual eyes to see it.

In our Gospel, the Jews saw a direct cause and effect relationship between sin and suffering. So they asked Jesus, “*Is this man’s blindness due to his own sin, or to the sin of his parents?*” Jesus answered, “*Neither ... it is so that the works of God might be made visible.*” This affliction we are experiencing provides an opportunity to show what God can do.

Our sorrow, pain, loss and anxiety are places of encounter with God. Obviously, He has our full attention now, so what deeper reality is God trying to show us? To answer that we turn to Alessandro Manzoni’s famous Italian novel, “*The Betrothed.*” The story is set in the horrific reality of the 1630’s plague that struck Milan, Italy. Wrestling with finding meaning and insight (just as we are) the author wrote, “*God never disturbs the joy of his children except to send a greater joy.*” Let’s dive in and see the greater joys our God may be bringing our world.

First, our pandemic is not the first humanity has suffered in history. Natural, physical and moral evils are tightly woven into human history. Pope Francis said we need to remember that there are always dark moments in life. We think they can happen only to someone else or somewhere else. This dark time, he said, includes everybody, none are excluded. When we look at the Cross this Lent and think of that dark moment, Venerable Archbishop Fulton Sheen said, “*[Remember,] unless there is a Good Friday in your life, there can be no Easter Sunday.*”

Second, this pandemic has and will continue to bring us into solidarity. The great Church Father, Origen, said, “*Where there is division, there is sin.*” The body of Christ cannot tolerate division. Hence St. Paul wrote that we are one body, but many parts. Haven’t we forgotten that? Think of all the silly issues we debated a month ago. Who cares now? Here is what matters, said Pope Francis: “*The darkness that entered our homes will disappear, with wounds in the heart a united humanity will rise again.*”

Third, this can help us take an inventory of what is truly precious. Many people comment on how strange it feels to slow down, to be alone, to have our freedom of movement restricted. I liken it to when I watched TV as a child and was so zoned out it made me deaf to my mother, until she stepped in front of the TV or turned it off. God has turned off our normal hectic pace in life. Let’s set aside our worries about finances or getting sick, and utilize this time to take a spiritual inventory of what is truly precious. Start with our relationships with family and friends. Communicate with them more frequently and reestablish communication with people we are estranged with. Do you miss Mass and the Eucharist yet? Maybe we were casual with our attendance or our belief in Jesus’ Real Presence. How precious a gift we had to be able to come together as one family to worship and receive our God.

Lastly, Pope Francis said when we come through this pandemic we will experience a post-war period, but we can re-start and rebuild using four pillars: roots, brotherhood, memory and hope. We have to remember our elderly and grandparents who have made us who we are. We can only rebuild by working together in a new sense of brotherhood. We will have the memory of the people who died, those who fought to save others and our shared ordeal that made us stronger. And we will move forward with hope in God who never fails.

Our Gospel is hinting that the blindness may be in us; just as the man born blind and the crowd couldn’t see the glory of God at first. If God can take Jesus through his own suffering and bring Him into glory, how can He use our current situation? That is our homework assignment to pray into the rest of this Lent. For St. Leo the Great said, “*We must be positive that the Divine Providence of God always watches over us, and arranges all circumstances for our benefit, even when they are unpleasant for us.*”