

March 26, 2017 10:30 a.m. Gull Lake Ministries

Fourth Sunday of Lent/Laetare Sunday

Diocesan Confirmation Retreat (and Women's Lenten Retreat)

Lent is going by so quickly.....We are now beyond the half-way point. Today we gather on the Fourth Sunday of Lent, and the Church tells us: "Laetare", that is REJOICE, because the great Feast of Easter is drawing closer!

Today's Scripture Readings are powerful and very meaningful for all of us---- every one of us who is taking seriously our call from God to turn away from sin and live our lives more in keeping with God's ways through our special practices of prayer, fasting and works of charity and mercy as we prepare to celebrate Easter in just three weeks. But especially for all of you gathered here for this weekend retreat, both the young people who have been reflecting on their faith as they prepare to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation in the next weeks/months, as well as the women who are here spending this weekend in prayerful retreat. We know we're getting closer to Easter because the Gospel Readings are getting longer and longer, right? But besides getting longer, they are more and more powerful in what Jesus wants us all to hear.

Let's consider today's First Reading from the first Book of Samuel. God gave Samuel a very important job to do: to go to the home of Jesse and anoint the new king God had chosen to lead the people of Israel since Saul was no longer fit to be the king. God had decided who He wanted---"chosen"---to be the new King to lead His holy People; but the only information God gave Samuel was that he would find this "chosen one" among the House of Jesse. When Samuel got there he realized that Jesse had eight sons, and God hadn't specified which one was the one He had chosen. So what did Samuel do? He "interviewed" each of Jesse's sons looking for the characteristics that HE thought were important. God intervened by gently reminding Samuel: *"Not as man sees does God see because man sees the appearance but the Lord looks into the heart."*-----There's a powerful insight. How often do we make that mistake? So Samuel asked Jesse if there were any other sons? As soon as the eighth, and youngest, son----David---- came in, God spoke to Samuel: *"There---anoint him, for this is the one!"* And so, Samuel anointed David as the new King, and the Reading tells us in a beautifully graphic expression that when Samuel anointed David, *"from that day on, the Spirit of the Lord **rushed** upon David."*

But let's not miss the important point here: God had already chosen David as the one he wanted to be the King. When Samuel anointed David, the anointing with oil set David apart as "the chosen one", and marked him as the one upon whom God's Spirit would forever rest.

How does that important point apply to you Confirmation candidates? Because God has chosen each and every one of you who are preparing to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation----You are God's "chosen ones". And someday soon, when the day of your Confirmation comes, I will have the great joy of anointing you with Sacred Chrism, and that's when God's Holy Spirit will also "rush" upon each of you. And at that point, your "calling"---your "vocation" to live good and holy lives that you received on the day of your baptism---your initiation into the faith---will be completed, and God's Holy Spirit will be with you to guide and strengthen you for the "mission" that God will be asking you to take on.

Today's Gospel Reading is really long, and really important for all of us. We usually refer to this Gospel passage as the "Curing of the Man Born Blind." Remember that the young man was just sitting there, along the road, as he had done every day, rain or shine, for most of his life. He was minding his own business, and, as always, he was being ignored by the passing crowds, his "disability" having sentenced him to a life-time of being "marginalized", begging for a living, while the world passed him by! Jesus and His disciples are walking along the road. Jesus notices him, which occasioned what the disciples probably thought would be an "interesting discussion": "*Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?*" Jesus responds (and notice, no one is talking **to/with** the young man), and while Jesus is responding, He bends down, spits on the ground, makes clay out of the dirt and spit, and wipes it on the young man's eyes. So, remember, the Blind Man didn't ask Jesus for anything---Jesus took the initiative in working this miracle, which is very unusual.

Just for a moment, let me ask you to try to put yourself in that young man's shoes. First of all, you'll have to imagine that you've been blind all your life. You're sitting there when suddenly this group of men gather and start talking about you, and all of a sudden one of them is smearing wet dirt on your eyes and telling you: "*Go wash in the Pool of Siloam*". That's when your life is changed forever. First of all, you can somehow, **see**----you didn't even know what that meant before, but now, a whole new world opens up and it's **incredible!** **Then**, you go from someone that no one paid any attention to, to someone who is now the center of everyone's attention. All of a sudden, you're being questioned;

you're being pushed from one group to another: neighbors, then the Pharisees, then your Parents get pulled into it, then the Pharisees are grilling you again. Finally there is this Man called Jesus, Whom you can now actually see, who "encounters" you in a way you've never known before. This is truly a "life-changing" experience-----an absolute conversion.

As St. John records the events, the young man goes through a noticeable change in the way He refers to Jesus: first, he calls him "a Man"; then "a Prophet"; then "a Man from God"; and finally, he proclaims Him as "Lord", and he worships Him. The young man goes from being a "nobody", to a Celebrity (of sorts), to one who begins to tell others about Jesus, what we would call "an Evangelist"! He goes from being blind, to having sight; from a conversion of heart, to spiritual insight---being able to "see" with the "*eyes of faith*".

This is really an amazing Gospel passage. At the end, we hear Jesus makes the point by telling the Pharisees: "*If you were blind, you would have no sin (which goes back to the original question the Disciples asked); but now you are saying "We see", so your sin remains.*" In other words, the Pharisees were "spiritually blind" because they refused to "see" Jesus for Who He really is. So, the important question we need to ask ourselves: "Do we see with the "eyes of faith"?"

During this retreat, I understand that your Confirmation Candidates were reflecting on four important questions: Why God? Why Jesus? Why the Holy Spirit? And Why the Church? And of course the foundational question, within each of those questions, is: Why me? Who am I in my relationship with God?

Our journey of faith isn't just about memorizing the Ten Commandments, knowing facts about our faith, being able to have enough service hours, or answer all the right questions so I can be permitted to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation---Our journey of faith is about you and I responding to God's call---standing up to be God's "chosen one"---being able to live our faith with courage and joy in this world---and eventually, we pray, having God welcome us to Heaven when our life on earth is ended so we can live with Him forever. ***Our journey of faith is all about an encounter with the living God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit---and living that relationship with God in, and through, the Church as our way to salvation.***

Today's Gospel story is about an "encounter" between Jesus and the man born blind; so was last week's Gospel account of the "encounter" between Jesus and

the Samaritan Woman; and that is what we will hear next week as well in Jesus' miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead. That's what Jesus does: He encounters us in love. That is the story of our lives. Pope Francis wrote in his very first Encyclical: "Faith is born of an encounter with the living God who calls us and reveals His love, a love which precedes us and upon which we can lean for security and for building our lives." ("Light of Faith" (Lumen Fidei), #1) He goes on to say that it is through this encounter with Jesus that He gives us *new eyes of faith* to see with----a "vision of the future" opens up before us.

We heard St. Paul tell us so powerfully in today's Second Reading: "*You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.*" Listen again. He doesn't say, you were once in "darkness"; no, he says that we were once "darkness" itself! Because of our encounter with Jesus who is the Light of the World, we are now light itself! Paul then gives us our challenge: "*Live as Children of Light*". Why? Because light is productive: *producing every kind of goodness, righteousness, and truth!* He also urges us: "*Take no part in the fruitless works of darkness*". We all know what those "works of darkness" are, right? They can seem so appealing, so enjoyable, ----but they're empty, and they're dangerous. They live "in darkness" for a reason! Paul urges us to let Light shine upon everything and expose it.

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ: As long as we live in Christ, we are light! Remember the great song: "This little Light of Mine?" That simple message is so essential to what Jesus is telling us today, and how we are to live our lives by "letting our light shine, shine shine, all the time." Your light is sorely needed in our world. It's not just your light that you are shining, but the light that is the result of your encounter with the Living One---the "Light of the World"!

And so, we need to keep in mind what Samuel learned when he was sent to anoint the new King: we need to see others, we need to make choices, we need to form opinions----not just on what I think, believe or see, but as God sees, teaches, and reveals to us---to do that with the vision of faith.

Jesus wants to know us---to love us---to maintain a strong relationship with us throughout our lives. He wants us to enter into this loving encounter with Him, and with His Church. He wants us to be light that radiates from Him, the Light of the World. And He wants us to take that light, expose the darkness and let the light shine for all the world to see.

Just like the young man in the Gospel, who once was blind but now he could see with his bodily eyes **and** with the eyes of faith, became one who shared the Good News with anyone who would listen (an evangelist), we too are called to do the very same---to be evangelists and witnesses to the joy of the Good News of Jesus, the Light of the World.

God bless you, now and always.