

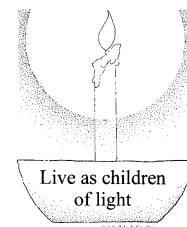
FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT—(2008 SECOND SCRUTINY)

MARCH 2, 2008 FR. JOE SOBIERAJSKI, S.J.

1 SAMUEL 16:1B, 6-7, 10-13A

EPHESIANS 5:8-14

JOHN 9:1-41



In the prologue to his Gospel, St. John first introduces the imagery of light and darkness: “through Him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light that shines in darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.” That image of Christ as light is woven throughout the whole of John’s Gospel almost like the play of chiaroscuro in a Renaissance painting bringing form, definition and meaning to the work. And today’s Gospel from John plays on that image of light and darkness in terms of blindness and sight, and is supported by our reading from Ephesians where Paul also speaks of light and darkness.

Our Gospel, this wonderful and long story about the man born blind, first appears to be merely a story about healing, but it is more than that and very different from other healing miracles. Ordinarily people come to Jesus asking for a cure, be it from a hemorrhage, or blindness, or leprosy. But this poor man seems even oblivious to Jesus presence, and is in Jesus’ own words an instrument through which, “the works of God might be made visible.” Jesus further states that while He is in the world He is the Light of the world, and then without even the least suggestion of a plea from the blind man, He anoints his eyes with mud made from saliva and clay, and sends him to wash in the pool of Siloam: an anointing and washing, which by the way seems to parallel our own sacrament of baptism. And like our baptism leads to something greater than physical sight.

The young man finds himself undergoing a rather harsh interrogation by the Pharisees not once but twice, and through their questions he seems to grow in an infant faith that leads him to confess that his healer is “from God.” Later under Jesus’ gentle questions he confesses that he believes that Jesus is the “Son of man”. This story of his blindness and sight then is a kind

of parable moving from no faith, to an infant faith, to a more mature faith. The strange paradox in this story is that those who cannot see come to see and understand with the eyes of faith, and those who claim they can see are both sightless and faithless.

Paul's use of the light-darkness theme is found in Thessalonians, Corinthians, Colossians, and here in Ephesians. Paul speaks to the Ephesians faithful as ones who "were once in darkness, and who now are children of the light," and they are "children of the light" because they now live in Christ. There is here of course an obvious reference to their baptism, which in the early Church was referred to as "photoasmos" or "illumination" or "enlightenment," and therefore, this is an understandable reading for this Fourth Sunday of Lent as a support and encouragement for those to be baptized at Easter. But, there is also a suggestion here that even as "children of light" we often find that there is a tension between who we are as a result of Baptism and the lure of "darkness" which offers constant appeal. Paul was well aware that the darkness of sin can eclipse those who walk in the light if they are not careful. Time and time again in his letters he warns the various communities about being tricked by some illusionary light that leads them away from Christ, a light that in reality is darkness, deception, and sin. Today's reading makes it clear that the Christian needs not only to resist and reject what the darkness hides, the Christian must also expose it, because once brought into the light, such darkness and sin cannot continue to prosper and confuse, but like the wicked witch of the West washed by a pail of water, it melts and ceases to be a danger.

While that warning and encouragement is certainly intended for those about to receive Baptism at Easter, it is also meant for those asking for full Communion and for all of us. There's not one of us, unless we have managed to kill our conscience, who does not know the tension we each face in being the men and women who are called to be, no, who are the Body of Christ and Children of Light, and the temptations of the darkness we meet every day.

Fidelity to our relationships, whether with our spouses or our friends is constantly threatened by the shadow of a society that far too often sees such fidelity as stupid and meaningless if it interferes with one pleasure or advancement. Likewise our honesty and integrity can be shaken by society's acceptance of the darkness of lies, backbiting, and one upmanship not only in business but also in our personal lives. The prince of darkness has many ways to confound and confuse us, and we need always to be on guard.

We are a People of Light, yes, but we all know that our light flickers, and sometimes burns with different intensities. Lent reminds us of the gift that was ours at Baptism. When we see those who come to us as the Church found in this community of St. Peter's to be baptized and received into full Communion, we should not only remember the life of light that was placed within at our own Baptism, but also acknowledge our responsibility to be light to those very people that seek us out. We can only hope that part of the reason that they are with us is that the Light of Christ does offer a welcoming glow within us as a community. Yet, the very fact that people seek us out as Church increases our responsibility not only toward ourselves, but also to others, to fight the darkness which can envelope us in both personal sin and institutional sin.

Because it is made up of sinful men and women, the Church itself has always been sinful. Certainly we have also been blessed with many saintly men as leaders of the Church, but there has also been corruption at the highest level at various times in the two thousand years of our history, especially when the Church was a political as well as a spiritual power. And, we all know too well the darkness that has scandalized the Church in this country over the past decade. It has shown us that such sinful acts as those brought to light by the priest scandal can have devastating effects not only on the sinner and the victim but on countless others, and indeed the whole church. The fact that it was brought to light was, I believe, a "graced moment" for repentance and forgiveness that can renew us as a Church no

matter how painful it was for us to experience. But beyond that scandal we need to recognize that every sin, no matter how private, be it a sin of commission or omission, has some effect beyond the one who commits it. To be light is to know that we are responsible for more than ourselves. To be light is to have the vision of Jesus as servant to others and to thus build up the Church. As beacons of light we insure our own salvation in Christ, and we also guide other to Him.