

Welcome to the fourth Sunday of Lent, we are about 20 days into the season or roughly at halftime. This is when we go back to the locker room and consider what's working and what's not and how to approach the second half. Today's readings gives us powerful spiritual fuel as they talk about how God sees us and how blindness interferes with our journey to Him.

The first reading comes from Samuel and we see how God sees us by how he chooses his anointed one. Samuel goes to Jesse's house and immediately assumes God want the eldest of Jesse's sons as he appears to be the most accomplished, but God says no. For, "Not as man sees does God see, because man sees the appearance

but the LORD looks into the heart." You could say Samuel was blind to the way God sees people.

God chooses the youngest, the least accomplished, an unfinished work. As his creator, God wants to continue his work in David, and make him a leader of His chosen people. David is quickly anointed and filled with the Holy Spirit. In much the same way that we are anointed in our baptism and filled with the Holy Spirit so that God can continue his work and take us to completion. We were unfinished then and are unfinished today whether we're five or 95 and Lent is about taking meaningful steps towards God's vision for our lives.

Going back to the sports analogy, what are our career goals as Christians? Where do we want to be when we, "retire" from this life? I propose today's responsorial psalm as the theme song for our retirement parties. "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." It's the end of our lives, we've left all our worldly belongings behind, and we stand naked and alone walking toward the light, who is Jesus.

"Beside restful waters he leads me, he refreshes my soul." At this point all we have is a soul.

"Even though I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil; for you are at my side with your rod and your staff that give me courage." And in that time, we will need courage.

"You spread the table before me in the sight of my foes; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. This anointing is an ancient tradition reserved for honored guests. I'd be happy to be a mediocre guest..."

And finally, "Only goodness and kindness follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD for years to come." This sounds like the place to be.

In this psalm, Jesus takes us into his protection. It's what Jesus died to give us. Now, let's look at today's gospel to see how we get there...

God knows we are in an unfinished state and Jesus is here to correct our vision and keep us on the right path. He plays the role of the great ophthalmologist. Let's consider how blindness affects the various characters in the gospel story and see who we relate to as it applies to our journey.

Starting with the apostles. "Does the beggar's blindness come from his sin or the sin of his family?" Jesus says, "Neither." This gives the apostles a new perspective, a new pair of lenses to see the world through. "Neither he nor his parents sinned; it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him." How can we find ways to see the world through the eyes of Christ?

Now let's consider the blind man himself, who relies completely on the goodness of others. He's like a blind sheep that the shepherd has to lead around on a leash. I think his odds of finding the good shepherd in heaven are excellent, because of his daily dependence on the Lord.

Next, we have the neighbors who hear about the miracle of Jesus and ask where is he? Their blindness has not been removed but they get a flash of Christ through this miracle and seek to know him better. Many of us fall into this category. We hear about someone else's faith story and we're drawn into a deeper understanding of God.

Finally, we have the Pharisees. They know a lot about the law, but are blind to the barriers of greed and power keeping them from opening their hearts to God, who is in now their midst. They are divided amongst themselves and I imagine within themselves. Jesus is teaching a new way, a new law, and it threatens their way of life. Jesus asks for complete surrender and it's difficult to let go.

As we identify with the various characters in this gospel, let it help us to uncover the blind spots in our lives.

Now for a real-life story from our St. James community. In December, a young man who graduated from St. James Academy is diagnosed with a rare form of cancer. Our Parents in Prayer group sends an email asking for prayers. The condition worsens and last week a rosary is organized to pray for him and his recovery. There's a blindness at play, as the medical profession knows little about this type of cancer.

Sometime God acts in anticipation of our prayers, and the day before the rosary the family identifies a cancer clinic in Texas and flies their son there for treatment. It just happens that the world leader in this type of cancer is available the next morning and soon after their son has a complete treatment plan. The wandering in the dark is replaced through the light of Christ.

At the rosary, the presence of the Holy Spirit illuminates the Zoom call as 60 tiny squares of faces came together in prayer. The battle is not over and more rosaries are planned, but the light of Christ is alive and well for this young man and his family. This is just one Lenten story to consider as you regroup for the second half of Lent. A witness to the Good Shepherd in our midst, removing blindness, bringing hope and giving comfort in uncertain times.