

*I am the light of the world, says the Lord;
whoever follows me will have the light of life. (john 8:12)*

Today is Laetare Sunday – “Laetare” is a Latin word taken from the entrance antiphon of the Liturgy and it simply means “rejoice”. We rejoice because Easter is near (And so, rather than wear the usual “Violet” vestments of the Lenten Season, on this Sunday the priest usually wears rose colored vestments – and don’t anybody dare say that they are “pink”).

And today’s gospel (John 9: 1-41) about Jesus’ cure of a man born blind points us to Easter Vigil when we light up the Paschal Candle and proclaim that Jesus, our Light, dispels the darkness of sin. This year the celebration of the Easter Vigil and of Easter Sunday will most likely be celebrated without the physical presence of the faithful; but our faith in the Risen Lord anchors our hope in the promise of his Resurrection. If the Lord takes us to it, he’ll take us through it. As so, on this Laetare Sunday, even from our homes we do well to reflect on today’s Gospel reading – and Jesus’ gift of sight, the sight of faith, to the man born blind.

There’s a story from the Indian subcontinent about six blind men and an elephant. It goes something like this: once upon a time, in a village where these six blind men lived, they heard that someone had brought an elephant to the village. The blind men couldn’t go and “see” it – but they figured they might as well go and “feel” it in order to learn what an elephant was. The first blind man felt the elephant’s leg and determined that an elephant was pretty like a pillar; the second blind man touched the elephant’s tail and declared that an elephant was simply like a rope; the third grabbed hold of the elephant’s trunk and said the elephant was much like a tree branch; the fourth held ear and pronounced it like a fan. The fifth blind man leaned against the elephant’s side and thought the elephant to be a wall and the sixth one put his hands around the tusk of the elephant and went off saying that an elephant was like a pipe.

Of course, when they shared their observations with one another there was a lot of arguing. Each of the blind men was partly in the right; but all were in the wrong.

Like those blind men sometimes we think we know about something but we’re still in the dark – because we don’t consider another perspective other than our own.

We don’t have to be blind to have “blind spots”. We might be able to see what the gospel says about one thing, but we are blind to other things. How many of us are blind to the poverty and the pain of our neighbor? Our culture today is seemingly “enlightened”

about many things – we see the wrongness of racism, of sexism but we are blind to the slaughter of the unborn.

In the gospel today the Pharisees certainly had a blind spot when it came to Jesus. They were spiritually blind to the reality of whom Jesus was. There is the saying: Seeing is believing. But in the Pharisees' case, even seeing the miracle didn't bring them to believe in it or in Jesus.

But the blind man does come to believe in Jesus – but not instantaneously – he has to follow a path, like all of us do. Our path, of course, includes our journey through Lent with its invitation to conversion – that is, to address those blind spots in our lives that can obscure our true identity and vocation as missionary disciples of Jesus Christ.

At first the man born blind doesn't know much about who Jesus is – just enough to say that he is a prophet; later, after he's been kicked out of the temple, Jesus finds him and asks him: Do you believe in the Son of Man? He answers, "Who is he that I may believe in him". Jesus answers, "You have seen him, the one who is speaking with you is he." And the once blind man says, "I do believe, Lord" and he worshiped him.

The message of this gospel of this Fourth Sunday of Lent is not that "seeing is believing" – rather the gospel teaches us that to believe is to see. May the light of faith dispel the darkness of those blind spots that we still have.

Mother Teresa used to say: "if we pray, we will believe; if we believe we will love; if we love, we will serve."

As Easter approaches, let us pray that we see Christ more clearly, love him more dearly, and follow him more nearly