

Laetare Sunday – 4th Sunday of Lent (Year A) – March 26, 2017

1 SM 16:1B, 6-7, 10-13A; PS 23: 1-3A, 3B-4, 5, 6; EPH 5:8-14; JN 9:1-41

Yesterday at noon, 27 Catholics prayed the Rosary outside of the **Planned Parenthood** by Thunderbird Hospital. A young married couple from another parish joined us, and, arriving a few minutes before noon, they were surprised to see that the “**abortuary**”—I refuse to call these evil places “**clinics**”—was closed. They even asked, “**Does it open at noon?**” When they learned that this location suspends operations on Saturdays, they looked perplexed—probably wondering why we pray on a day when no babies’ heartbeats are deliberately stopped.

While we were praying the Rosary, a particular thought arose in my mind—brought on, no doubt, by the newcomer couple’s curiosity:

“I wonder what people driving by—some of whom shout or honk at us—think about a group of Christians standing in opposition to Planned Parenthood... while it’s closed.”

After all, what good is a “**protest**” if there’s no opposition?

It’s a logical question, isn’t it?

Well, **yes...and no.**

For starters, we were **praying**, not **protesting**. But, just for the sake of argument—if we **were** protesting, then for those who object to us **being** there, it would be logical to ponder, from a **purely practical standpoint**:

How do we measure “**success**”?

We didn’t save any **babies**—because, at that location, they don’t kill on Saturdays. We didn’t make anyone—staff or patients—uneasy by our presence, so there was no **psychological victory**. There were no news **cameras**, no **counter-protesters**—so no **publicity points**. The fact that pro-lifers were “protesting” an empty building must have made us seem even **more** incomprehensible to the pro-abortion “**drive by shouters**” than we already are!

In the end, there were no **measurable** indicators of success...at least in terms of the way purely pragmatic people measure success.

But secular standards of success are very shortsighted to anyone who recognizes the truth **St. Paul** expressed in the **6th Chapter of Ephesians**:

...we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. (Eph 6:10)

Without faith—spiritual realities don't even **exist**, so they can't *be* visible. Faithless folks are blind to the spiritual realm—some of them, because nobody has ever pointed them toward God; others, because they don't **want** there to be a God, because if there **is** a God who made us, then human beings are accountable to the Creator—and accountability interferes with the pleasure-addict's pursuit of "*what I want*".

The faithless who **could** see *us* in front of **Planned Parenthood**, could *not* see the "spiritual hosts of wickedness" arrayed in full force against this Rosary-bearing "*band of brothers and sisters*", battling *not* over **politics**, but contending for **souls**, including the souls of the **medical personnel** who dismember children in that very facility; the souls of the **women** deceived into trading their baby's life for a counterfeit "freedom"; and the souls of the **men of no courage and no integrity** who pressure a **wife**, a **girlfriend** or a **daughter** to sacrifice *her* motherhood, so **he** doesn't have to sacrifice *his* self-indulgence.

In the most recent book-length interview with **Pope Benedict XVI** entitled *Last Testament*, the Pope Emeritus said something very pertinent to today's Readings:

"...Christianity is about a concern to recognize the truth, which is light. By virtue of faith a simple man is enlightened, because he sees what others, who are so clever, cannot perceive. In this sense, faith is enlightenment. Baptism [is] enlightenment, a coming into the light, becoming one who sees. My eyes are then opened. I see this dimension which is wholly other, something that is not possible for me to perceive with the eyes of the body alone."

—Pope BXVI
Last Testament, pp. 12-13

The so-called "**enlightened**" *elites* of today—the secularists who shape the culture through **politics** and **media**; though the **education system** and **social engineering**—are not so very different from the Pharisees—the *elites of their time and place*—whom Jesus confronted in today's Gospel. After a long back and forth over the appropriateness of healing on the Sabbath, the Gospel reports:

Some of the Pharisees who were with [the man] heard [what Jesus said] and said to him, “Surely we are not also blind, are we?” Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you are saying, ‘We see,’ so your sin remains. (Jn 9:40-41)

In other words Jesus exposed their pride—driven by the desire to preserve their **power**, **influence** and **comfort**—and how that pride blinded them to the deeper, more important realities—the **dignity of the human person**; and the **power, love and mercy of God**.

The blind man **encountered** this divine power—*experienced the Lord’s love and mercy*—and his eyes were opened! The Pharisees saw Jesus as nothing more than a lawbreaker and a threat to their **influence** and **authority**. They overlooked the **miracle** and focused on their **motive**. They judged Jesus by their pre-conceived notions, while the man whose sight was restored, judged Jesus by the fruit of his works:

[The Pharisees] called the man who had been blind and said to him, “...we know that this man is a sinner.” He replied, “If he is a sinner, I do not know. One thing I do know is that I was blind and now I see.” (Jn 9:24-25)

The Pharisees saw Jesus as a threat to what they held dear...what they **coveted**.

Don’t obstinate sinners in every age—including today—do the same?

Don’t those who navigate their lives by *personal preferences disguised as conscience* refuse to submit themselves to Jesus—and reject **his authority over their lives**—when **his commands** conflict with **their demands**?

Don’t *we* do that every time we sin?

What defines a **modern Pharisee** is one of two things: *either* an overly **strict** interpretation of rules that they *do* like—to the exclusion of the **charity**; or an overly **loose** interpretation of the rules that they *don’t* like—to the exclusion of **truth**.

A modern Pharisee is anyone who interprets the law—**either too strictly or too loosely**—in such a way as to protect and preserve self-interest.

The Pharisees’ blindness rendered them incapable of seeing both the **divinity** of **Jesus**...and the **dignity** of the **man** born blind. As a result, the Pharisees were, *as Jesus*

said, still in their sins—blinded by their willfulness and thus incapable of keeping Jesus’ **dual commandment** to love **God**...and love their **neighbor**.

As Jesus’ interaction with the blind man demonstrated, it was the man’s willingness to obey Jesus command to “**go and wash**” (cf. Jn 9:7) that led to the very healing that allowed him to see Jesus with his own eyes. There can be no friendship *with* Jesus without obedience *to* Jesus.

Jesus heals **our** blindness in a similar way. First, the **Sacrament of Baptism** supplies us with the capacity to see into the **divine dimension**, because in **Baptism**, we receive the light of Christ who called himself, “**the light of the world**” (cf. Jn 9:5). In a parallel way, when contact with the world exposes us to **further contamination from sin**, we are washed **again** by the Lord’s mercy in the **Sacrament of Penance**—in Confession.

In the **Holy Sacrifice of the Mass**—the *Sacrament of Sacraments*—we hear **God’s word of power, love and mercy** proclaimed in the Scriptures during the **Liturgy of the Word** which sharpen our eyes of faith to then see **Jesus** in the **Holy Eucharist**.

In a very similar way, Jesus speaks to *us* what he spoke to the **man born blind**:

When Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, he found him and said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” He answered and said, “Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?” Jesus said to him, “You have seen him and the one speaking with you is he.” (Jn 9:35-37)

It’s noteworthy that Jesus used real **matter**—*clay and water*—combined with his **words** of command, to enable the blind man to fully perceive the effective work of Jesus in his life.

And Jesus gave us a Church that likewise uses the **his words** and the **real stuff of creation**—*water, oil, bread, wine and the words of Scripture*—to open the eyes of faith and to help us, throughout our lives, to sharpen our **spiritual vision**...to see Jesus **as he is**...and to see Jesus *in one another*.