4th Sunday of Lent – Cycle A – March 25 & 26, 2017

“We Walk by Faith and not by Sight”

1 Samuel 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13
Psalm 23:1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6
Ephesians 5:8-14
John 9:1-41

I know very little about surfing except it is amazing to watch and something that takes a great deal of skill and ability to master. I loved watching surfing on Wide World of Sports back when I was a kid, marveling at the size of the waves and never fully understanding if those who road those gargantuan waves were super brave or absolutely insane. Though I’ve never actually had the opportunity to surf, I have seen enough in my travels along the coast to admire and almost envy those who are able to do it on a regular basis let alone professionally. There must be some kind of spiritual awakening that takes place when “dropping in” on a wave. With every nerve aware and all of one’s senses fully alive, surfers literally take this leap of faith into the violent and beautiful act of nature as the ocean heaves and breaks toward the shore on sound but narrow boards and very little else. Professional big wave surfer Laird Hamilton puts it this way, “I think being a surfer is all about faith, because you are waiting for something that you really can’t see.”

This is particularly true for Brazilian surfer Derek Rabelo (ra-BEL-ō). Derek’s father, before Derek was born, prayed to God that his son might grow up to be a famous Brazilian professional surfer. And in a sense, his prayers were answered but in a way that was not expected. Derek is a great surfer and a professional surfer per se (he makes a living surfing) but what makes Derek so special, unique and inspiring to those in the professional surfing world is that he is blind. In fact, Derek was featured in a 2014 documentary called Beyond Sight: the Derek Rabelo Story about his desire and quest to surf Pipeline, one of the most dangerous and challenging waves in surfing. Derek has not let his lack of sight be an obstacle to living life to the fullest and has been a living example to those around him. He is a person of deep and profound faith and the phrase that guides his life and that he shares with those he meets is, “We live by Faith and not by sight.”
This is the message of our readings today. Today our readings are telling us that it is through the eyes of faith that we can be fully confident and able to truly see the work of God and that physical sight and seeing can be misleading, obscured, and utterly unreliable to us at times in life.

In our first reading we hear about how the perception of God’s chosen king differs from God’s actual chosen king. “Not as man sees does God see, because man sees the appearance but the Lord looks into the heart.” Likewise in our second reading, Paul uses the image of being in the Light of Christ and the darkness of sin as determining what is visible versus what is kept from sight, respectively, in terms of our salvation. Finally in our Gospel we hear the story of the man born blind whose eyes of faith were opened along with his ability to physically see for the first time in his life. Conversely however, the eyes of faith of the Pharisee’s are blinded as they seek to slander and reject the truth of whom Jesus really is and why he’s come. In all of these readings we are warned of the various obstacles to seeing well with our eyes of faith.

These are timely readings as we celebrate Laetare Sunday today on this 4th Sunday of Lent. Laetare is an imperative that means “Rejoice!” and we do so today because we have reached the half way point of this season of penance, preparation and perseverance as we walk, step by step with Christ, toward the memorial of our redemption. And it is with the eyes of faith that we are able to walk with Christ in this time. If we didn’t have the ability to see with these eyes of faith we might be deceived into thinking that Jesus died broken and defeated. Our human eyes might tell us that Christ is no longer with us; that the story of Christ that we re-tell in his Passion is just that, a story. Our human eyes may look around us and see suffering and death and strife and war and greed and selfishness and apathy and hatred and conclude that God has in fact abandoned us instead of seeing Holy Spirit working in our world quietly, constantly, confidently, lovingly, Mercifully, victoriously and often inconspicuously in the world around us. We see this in people like Derek Rabelo, another man born blind, who is also here, “so that the works of God might be made visible through him” like we heard in the Gospel. It is in these ways that we get a glimpse of God continuing to work in the ways that inspire us and encourage us to see fully with eyes opened through true faith so that we too, like Derek, may walk by faith and not by sight.