

Here we are at the mid point of Lent, the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday known as *Laetare* Sunday taken from the Latin meaning “Rejoice” which sets a tone of joyful anticipation of the Easter mystery, Jesus’ Resurrection. My wife Dodie and I have two very special reasons to be rejoicing. They are our two granddaughters, Kate and Lauren who are visiting Grandma and Grandpa from California for their spring break. (They arrived yesterday and are in church with my wife to hear Grandpa offer this homily.) They usually ask one question when I tell them I’m giving a homily, “Will you tell a joke?” For them here are two short jokes.

Q: How many Catholics does it take to screw in a light bulb?

A: None, we use candles.

Q: How many Californians does it take to change a light bulb?

A: 10--One to change the bulb and 9 others to share the experience.

I chose the jokes about light bulbs for two reasons, the first is to please the granddaughter’s which is what we as grandparents should do and the second is because the word light is in both of the jokes. **LIGHT**

Jesus says in today’s gospel that, “While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” And yet the whole of chapter nine from John’s gospel is about blindness and having our eyes opened. Jesus wants us to open our eyes to the light shining from Him. The process of physically healing the blind man happens very quickly. Jesus makes clay and puts it on the blind man’s eyes and tells him to go and wash. The gospel writer tells us he did this and was able to see. Now begins his spiritual journey to see with the eyes of Jesus. Jesus’ eyes see beauty in all things because God created all things.

Jesus told us that the greatest commandment is to love God with our whole heart, with our whole mind and with our whole body. He then said the second greatest commandment is to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. The season of Lent offers us the opportunity to journey deeper into our relationship with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Just as the blind man first doesn't know what happened to him, "I washed and was able to see" so it is with me. As a young man just married I was drafted in the Army during the Viet Nam war and served my country by going to Viet Nam. During my time overseas I saw many things that bothered me, things that made me very angry at the Vietnamese people. Upon my return home and leaving the Army I returned to civilian life. I thought everything was back to normal. Life went on. I advanced in my career. Our family moved many times. But something else was happening during this time. Every time I saw an Asian appearing person I could feel anger and hatred boiling up in me. I would avoid any contact with them. Because of my past experiences in the war, I was blind to the dignity of that person created in the image and likeness of God. Just like the blind man in today's gospel who over time came to see Jesus in a different light from just a healer, to a prophet, and finally to the Son of Man; I was able during my spiritual journey through experiences like Marriage Encounter, Christ Renews His Parish, Small Church Communities, and my formation for the Permanent Diaconate to talk about my anger and hatred and begin to see Jesus in ALL people. I had a real healing moment happen not too long ago when as an ordained minister I baptized an Asian child. Not only did I participate with the community in welcoming her into the church but I could see Jesus in her. What a joy filled moment for me. God is good, God is merciful and God is loving.

I'm not all the way there yet because I have other areas of darkness. But on those days when darkness covers my eyes I try to recall the words from that beautiful song, "Open my eyes, Lord, help me to see your face. Open my eyes, Lord, help me to see."

Some days are better than others and I feel that bright light shining on me and in me. In the verse sung by the choir/cantor before the Gospel was proclaimed we heard the words, "I am the light of the world, says the Lord, whoever follows me will have the light of life."

You and I are here, I believe, because we want to be fed for our Lenten journey and to have that journey bathed in the light of Christ. As you and I prepare for the sacrament of Eucharist today, let's take a moment to identify what keeps us in darkness. Is it jealousy, prejudice, intolerance, violence, fear, greed or hatred, or some other blindness? As Christians, we understand our inclination, yours and mine, towards such kinds of darkness, but we also know that we can rejoice in the Light of Christ which can dispel all the darkness. As we come forward to receive the body and blood of our Lord, our secure hope should be that we will receive the light we need for our journey this week.

"Open my eyes, Lord, help me to see."