

March 14, 2010

Fourth Sunday of Lent

First Reading: 1 Samuel 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a

Second Reading: Ephesians 5:8-14

Gospel Reading: John 9:1-41

Homilist: Deacon Mike Mocek

The four Gospels all contain narratives, or stories, about events in the earthly life and ministry of Jesus Christ. The three synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, contain many of the same stories often presented in the same sequence as they are believed to have occurred during Christ's public ministry and His journey to Jerusalem. But the fourth Gospel is different. John presents seven highly symbolic miracle stories as "signs" pointing us to the deeper theological truths of our faith -- our beliefs in and about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Today we heard, from the entire ninth chapter of the Gospel of John, the intricate and dramatic story of Jesus curing the man born blind. John presents this narrative as a sign by which Jesus shows himself to be the Light of the World. It is through this Light of Christ that the man born blind is able not only to see his physical surroundings for the first time, but he also comes to see Jesus Christ as He is, the glorious Son of Man sent by God. It is interesting to note that as the blind man's spiritual sight progresses and his faith grows, the religious leaders of that time descend into spiritual blindness. They insist that Jesus is a sinner. They reject His being from God and fail to recognize their own spiritual blindness and sinfulness.

In our second reading from his Letter to the Ephesians, Saint Paul reminds us

that, like the man born blind, we once were darkness but we are called to live as children of the light. It is through our baptisms that we are called out of darkness, out of sin and death, to receive the Light of Jesus Christ -- to live it and be light for others.

Last Saturday morning I started my weekend, as I often do, at the kitchen table with a cup of coffee and a newspaper. The first few articles that I read did little to help me overcome my blindness to the Light of Christ. One was about a Member of Congress resigning after being accused of harassing a member of his staff. There were articles about the recent Pentagon shooting, the small airplane flown into an Austin office building, and the uninhibited ranting of other malcontents. There were articles about former mayors of two major U.S. cities -- one charged with violating his probation and the other sentenced to fifteen years in prison for bribery. And there was an article about a physician convicted of murder in the poisoning death of his wife. My hopes for a little peaceful and pleasant reading that morning were fading fast. But then I turned to an article headlined, "West Texas Students Travel to Meet Inspirational Author." It opened my eyes and changed my day.

I know that many of you have read, or at least heard of the best-selling book, "Same Kind of Different as Me," by Ron Hall and Denver Moore. It is the true story of a very unlikely friendship and partnership between a wealthy Fort Worth art dealer and a homeless ex-convict. Phyllis Graham, a

sophomore English teacher at Snyder High School, made the book a reading assignment for her students, many of whom had shown little prior interest in reading. The students were captivated and deeply moved by the book. Seventy-five of them paid \$60 each and made the five-hour trip from Snyder to Fort Worth to meet the authors and see Union Gospel Mission, the homeless center where much of the book's story takes place. One student said the story inspired and changed him. Another said he came to see if the authors and setting were as he envisioned from the book. He was not disappointed.

This book and the story behind it have caused many eyes to be opened and much blindness to be cured. First, there are the book's authors and main characters. Denver Moore might best be described as a poor ex-convict with an attitude that blinded him from any opportunity for a better life. But Denver Moore's eyes were eventually opened. Through the compassion and persistence of Deborah and Ron Hall, he finally saw that he could trust others to help him climb out of the societal trap of poverty and homelessness. Ron Hall came to see and know a real person behind the face of poverty, and through that, he learned that making a difference in someone's life takes more than just handing that person a few dollars and walking away. Through reading the book and hearing the story, the eyes of many thousands of the rest of us were also opened to the realities of poverty and homelessness in our society and in our city. The sophomore English students from Snyder High School took their newfound eyesight to a new level. They took the initiative and made the effort to come and see

firsthand the story behind the book. I must admit that reading this newspaper article opened my eyes a little wider about Snyder, Texas. I came to see it as much more than just a place to stop for a good chicken-fried steak on the way to a football game in Lubbock.

We cannot lose sight of the fact that the lives and stories of Denver Moore and Deborah and Ron Hall did not always feel good. Denver Moore's early years were consumed with pain, hunger, bigotry, violence, crime, and drugs. Deborah and Ron Hall's early years of comfort and wealth gave way to much suffering and grief with Deborah's illness and death at the age of 55. God's hand and the Light of Jesus Christ were not always easy to see but they were always there to be seen and they eventually led these individuals, in different ways, to live in the Light of Christ and to be light for others.

With that understanding, I went back and re-read those articles in the newspaper about scandal, corruption, and despair. Where are the hand of God and the Light of Jesus Christ in those stories? Where are they in the difficult situations of our everyday lives that challenge us when we try to live, not in darkness, but in the light? The hand of God and the Light of Christ are always there for us too. But like the man born blind, we have to rely on our faith to overcome the blindness of sin, see the Light of Jesus Christ in all situations, and be light for others.