

Homily: Lent 4. Sunday 22nd March 2020

‘You were darkness once,’ says St Paul in the opening of the 2nd Reading today. Well, we certainly seem to be plunged into darkness all around the world at the moment. For many the enforced isolation, either because of being in a vulnerable age group, or because of certain medical conditions, or the sheer unknown of how this virus is spread, and the advice to avoid all crowds, can leave many to feel they are groping in darkness and despair.

With so much closed for everyone from Mass downwards, to pubs clubs, gyms, theatres and schools etc. It does seem that this particular year, from Epiphany onwards, when some of the hymns leading to Candlemas speak of the ‘people who walked in darkness’ or ‘longing for light we wait in darkness,’ and readings too: as we sang or heard them then, little knowing how soon we would be plunged back into darkness.

Light has always played an important part in Christian thought and worship. The Paschal candle, the pillar of fire, the light shining in the darkness that St John speaks of in his prologue; the altar candles we light, the candles we light for our prayers, all signs of the Christ, who we hear say in today’s gospel “I am the light of the world.”

St Paul describes the Christian journey from darkness to light, and captures the rising hope of the light, as we journey to Easter and the glory of Resurrection. We’re glad of the lighter days and evenings, and don’t forget *clock forward an hour at bedtime next Saturday*.

It will be a very different journey this year, as we will not be able to be present at the ceremonies of Holy Week and Easter. But the journey still goes on.

It is as Jesus goes along, that he saw the man blind from birth. The scene is set within the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles and features ceremonies of both **water** and **light**.

Each day water was carried from the pool of Siloam to the Temple. Light was the pillar of fire that protected and led them by night.

Water features much in the early chapters of John: Cana (chap.2) and the changing of water into wine: Nicodemus (chap 3) and the discussion of being born from water and the spirit, the woman at the well, (Chap 4) as Jesus asks water to quench his thirst. So now **Light** comes to the man born blind, as Jesus heals him, with spittle and paste from the dust of the earth, and tells him to wash in the pool of Siloam.

All the season of Lent is baptismal in character, and in the early church becoming a Christian was often called ‘illumination’ that is receiving the light of Christ. One of the ceremonies of Baptism (also of Confirmation) is anointing, which signifies receiving the Holy Spirit, and recall Jesus anoints his eyes.

In the rite of anointing with chrism at baptism, we pray that ‘you may remain for ever a member of Christ, who is priest, prophet and king.’

Our 1st Reading is of the prophet Samuel anointing David as king, and the last line says “the spirit of the Lord seized on David and stayed with him from that day on.” We respond, as ever to a 1st Reading with the Psalm, and what better could we have, think of the selfish panic buying, than; “The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.”

The great human story of the man born blind and the controversy following, lead him, as the previous week’s gospel of the woman at the well, to represent the stages of development of faith. This man blind from birth, who moves from ‘the man called Jesus’ to ‘He is a prophet’ to the full maturity of faith when Jesus asks him “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” and he replies ‘Lord I believe,’ and worshipped him.

At the moment many are asking, why this virus; what is going on. The question of the disciples whether it was the sin of the man or his parents which caused his blindness allows Jesus to dismiss the causal link between suffering and sin. Jesus says ‘the man was born blind so that the works of God might be displayed in him.’

The rejection of God by many could be just that. We have neglected God, the Creator and his creation, and Jesus the Redeemer. Lent is that time of coming back to the Lord our God, and his Son Jesus, who enlightens us and bids us be a light to others.

A Prayer: Father of mercy, you helped the man born blind to believe in your Son and through that faith to reach the light of your kingdom. Free us from the falsehoods that surround and blind us. Let truth be the foundation of our lives. May we live in your light forever. Lord Jesus, you are the true light that enlightens all people. In the breath of the Holy Spirit fan into flame the goodwill of all who have received your light in baptism. May our eyes be fixed on you as the light of life and the model of all virtue. May our minds be enlightened by your teaching and our values be according to your kingdom.