

THEY HAVE EYES YET THEY CANNOT SEE

This weekend we celebrate the fourth Sunday of Lent, traditionally known as Laetare Sunday. The term laetare is a Latin word for 'rejoice' which was derived from the opening antiphon in today's liturgy as seen in the book of Isaiah (66:10) where the prophet invites the people of Israel to rejoice. As at the time of this message from the prophet, the Israelites were still undergoing the devastating effect of exile yet the prophet exhorts them to rejoice and be joyful. It can only take a man of faith and hope to rejoice amidst suffering and pain and so in order to do this, one needs a spiritual sight which will enable him to see from a Divine perspective. As St. Augustine said, "You were made by Him, for Him; you are restless until you rest in Him." In the first reading of today, Samuel was unable to comprehend the reason behind the rejection of Eliab and the choice of David who was the least of Jesse's sons because he did not view it from a Divine perspective. Samuel who has once anointed Saul whom the scriptures described as the most handsome man in Israel (1Sam 9:2) was equally expecting God to choose Eliab who also had a lofty stature hence God told him; "take no notice of his appearance or height for God does not see as human beings see" (cf. 1Sam 16:7). Faith in God therefore goes beyond the eyes, it rather requires a kind of spiritual sight to see as God sees and perceive as God perceives.

Similarly, in the gospel reading of today we notice that the Pharisees who had the physical sight to see Jesus and even witnessed His miracles on several occasions still found it hard to believe in Him. On the contrary, a man who has been blind from birth and therefore lacked the physical eyes to see Jesus was able to believe in Him as someone from God. Note that the man did not have the opportunity to see Jesus even after his sight was restored because Jesus told him to go and wash in the pool of Siloam and did not go with Him yet he was able to testify strongly that Jesus must be a prophet from God. A strong indication that his belief in Jesus was not built on his ability to see Jesus physically. Pope Francis remarked, "Faith is not the ability to see, but to believe in what we cannot see." It is on this note that the letter to the Hebrews (11:1) describes faith as the realization of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen. It was only towards the end of the gospel narrative that the man was able to see Jesus physically and further professed his faith and worshipped Him.

Laetare Sunday is a gentle reminder that we are already halfway in Lent and gradually approaching the Easter celebration. Unfortunately, many of us are still groping in spiritual darkness and are unwilling to open ourselves to Jesus who is always ready to walk us through conversion just as he did last Sunday with the woman at the well. The healing of the blind man was not just a healing from physical blindness; the making of a paste of clay and spittle which is evocative of God's creation of man through clay and the washing at the pool of Siloam which is evocative of our baptism suggests a kind of spiritual rebirth which is what is expected of us during this Lenten season. St. Irenaeus said, "The glory of God is man fully alive."

One of the most disturbing features of today's gospel is not the man's blindness but the confidence of those who think they see perfectly well. The Pharisees were so certain that they

can judge what is true, what is faithful and what is pleasing to God and that certainly blinds them. While the man born blind gradually ascends into the light, they descended into the darkness. While the one who was blind sees, those who could see became blind.