

My Brothers and Sisters,

Although we are not celebrating Mass publicly, I hope that all of you have read today's readings and prayed in thanksgiving to God for all the blessings God has given us, especially the gift of Jesus who makes all love possible, while at the same time praying that we will be delivered from the coronavirus and the sufferings caused by it.

Today's Gospel story of the man born blind speaks to us on two levels.

On one level, it is a story of a man born blind being cured of his blindness. Today's Gospel and next Sunday's Gospel, the raising of Lazarus from the dead, are two of the most important miracles Jesus worked. They, more than his other miracles, revealed him as the Son of God. As the man born blind pointed out, "*It is unheard of that anyone ever opened the eyes of a person born blind.*" He would later profess faith in Jesus and worship him. In next Sunday's Gospel, Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days before Jesus raised him from the dead. At the end of next Sunday's Gospel, we are told that many of the Jews who saw what he had done began to believe in him.

Second, Jesus took this opportunity to challenge his disciples' belief that the man's blindness was caused by any sin of him or his parents. Even today some people believe, and some religious traditions teach, that when bad things happen to people, God is punishing them for their sins. Equally, some people believe the correlative: when good things happen to people, God is rewarding them for their goodness. We may remember that some people saw the tragedy of 9/11 as evidence of God's judgment upon contemporary American society. The same is happening now regarding the coronavirus. This past week I read an article listing the multitude of sins in our contemporary world for which God might be punishing us.

It is certainly true that our sins and bad choices often bring bad consequences. However, this does not mean that God is punishing us. We know, for example, that bad things often happen not only to good people but to the best people. Jesus' own death is the best evidence of this: he was completely innocent and without sin yet suffered a terrible death.

On another level, the story of the man born blind is the story of a man spiritually blind gaining spiritual sight. Jesus told his disciples that as long as he was in the world, he was the light of the world. Spiritual sight, then, depends on belief in Jesus.

When I was at St. Malachy's, parents of first communicants had to attend three sessions to help them prepare their children for First Communion. Every year, Sr. Edward Ann reminded them that we have two sets of eyes: our physical eyes and our eyes of faith. To believe in Jesus' real presence in the Eucharist, for example, we have to see with eyes of faith. To see with eyes of faith is to see God's presence, power, and activity within and among us, in every event and experience of our lives and world, and in all of history and creation, even in the midst of the coronavirus, its restrictions, and its consequences.

Our first and second readings offer two practical insights. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul talks about *works of darkness*. One test we can apply to our choices is whether we would want others, especially those whom we love and who love us, to know about them. If not, this is good indication that they are not good choices. In today's first reading, God warns Samuel not to judge by appearances: "*Not as man sees does God see, because man sees the appearance but the Lord looks into the heart.*" If we are honest, we all judge by appearances. For example, Stephen Covey has made the point that since the early 20th century, capacity for leadership has been measured more by personality than by character.¹ More importantly, since God alone knows the secrets of the heart, we are not qualified to judge people at all.

My brothers and sisters, you are always in my thoughts and my prayers, especially when I celebrate Mass daily. I miss celebrating Mass with you. Stay healthy, stay safe.

¹Stephen R. Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People: Restoring the Character Ethic*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), p. 19.