

THE FOURTH WEEK OF LENT

- Sunday** **The Fourth Sunday of Lent**
March 26 **Seeing the Truth about God**
 A reflection inspired by a text of Fr. Carroll Stuhlmueller
- Mon** **Monday of the Fourth Week of Lent**
27 **Learning to See God's Calls to Us**
 A reflection inspired by a text of Sr. Dianne Bergant
- Tues** **Tuesday of the Fourth Week of Lent**
28 **Letting God's Light Shine through Us**
 A reflection developed from a Letter by St. Ambrose
- Wed** **Wednesday of the Fourth Week of Lent**
29 **Mercy & the Gift of Inward Conversion**
 A reflection from a sermon by Bishop Alonso de Orozco
- Thurs** **Thursday of the Fourth Week of Lent**
30 **The Food We Need to Bear the Cross**
 A reflection developed from a homily by St. Augustine of Hippo
- Fri** **Friday of the Fourth Week of Lent**
31 **How People Come to See God**
 A reflection developed from a Letter by St. Theophilus of Antioch
- Sat** **Saturday of the Fourth Week of Lent**
April 1 **Prayer Brings Us God & Together**
 A reflection from St. John Chrysostom's Commentary on
 Second Corinthians

.....

.....

.....

Seeing the Truth about God

A reflection inspired by a text of Fr. Carroll Stuhlmueller

Those born blind go through life without being aware of a great deal of beauty. Of course, the sighted may also be oblivious to beauties only faith can reveal by means of a non-physical light. Again, to be able to see light isn't equal to being able to see goodness. Jesus' healed one born blind and give both sight and knowledge of God's love and mercy.

In Jesus' time there was no medical way to make eyes born blind work. Besides, making eyes functional doesn't give sight. The brain has to learn to process perception as sighted people do; without this one doesn't actually "see" what ordinary people do. Faith enables one to process experience in a way that reveals God and God's love and mercy, and shows us how to act with love and mercy like that of Jesus.

The Pharisees and scribes, who condemned Jesus for making mud with his spittle on the Sabbath, and using it to give the gifts of sight and faith, couldn't "see" God's presence where it really was. They couldn't see by the "light of faith" and only God can give this more than natural ability to see what is in front of us.

It was a fact that Jesus' healed a blind man on the Sabbath and made mud from spittle and dirt to do it, but what did that fact mean? To know that one has to know what God call us to do on the Sabbath. He calls us to spend the entire day doing things that make our relation with God closer and more complete. It's not a matter of what we don't do but of what we do. What Jesus did was draw a blind person into a radically deeper relationship with God by enabling him to perceive God as healer and savior present in Jesus.

God wants Jesus to be central to everyone's relationship with him. How many of us believe that but aren't actually able to see what it means practically? How many can't see the healing and saving power of God working through Jesus in what happens in and around them? A formerly blind person could and did see this, but his parents and some of the religiously dedicated people of his day couldn't or wouldn't. Thus they wouldn't let Jesus show them what is truly of central importance for God on the Sabbath.

What is central for God isn't abstaining from this or that but bringing the light that is faith-generated understanding to others in a way that heals things in them and shows them God's presence within them. Isn't learning to see this central to the observance of Lent? Am I letting Jesus heal my own blindnesses to this task by my way of keeping Lent?

LEARNING TO SEE GOD'S CALLS TO US

A reflection inspired by a text of Sr. Dianne Bergant

How often have you heard the comparison between the challenge of walking in a totally dark room and walking by faith? Trying to navigate life without faith is life like trying to walk through a totally dark room and not hurt yourself or anything in the room. Without faith we can't see God or relate as God would have us do to what actually happens in our lives.

Think of this past Sunday's Gospel story. Jesus healed a person born blind. He did it by God's power. There was no other way. Yet some of those dedicated to serving God couldn't admit Jesus had acted by God's power. They thought he had done something that was against God's will for keeping the Sabbath, so there had to be another explanation! Even the healed person's parents weren't willing to admit the truth, out of fear of being expelled from the synagogue for acknowledging Jesus' deed was God's deed. They no longer knew how to relate to their own son, just as the religious authorities didn't know how to relate to his healing.

Have you or I ever gotten trapped in this way? We hear that someone has done such and such and are convinced that God had forbidden that. But it was done by a person dedicated to God and actually led others to God! We aren't able to step back from the way we interpreted one of God's commands in order to recognize that God works in some of the ways that God actually does. Jesus confronts us with this.

On some occasions Jesus encountered people trapped like this and tried to help them by asking them what the purpose of the Sabbath is, so he could point out that his healing fulfilled that purpose. But they refused this help. They were certain they were right so Jesus was wrong. Today many prefer to say that another's interpretation of what Jesus did is wrong because they know Jesus couldn't have inspired a person to do what was actually done. Yet they can't explain how it could have been done and had such good effects apart from God's power and grace.

The cure for blindness of this sort is getting to know Jesus really well. That is what Lent is for. We know we are getting to know him when we begin to see opportunities for compassion and mercy and mutual help that we were formerly blind to. We are being given a new kind of faith-sight. Lord, help our faith to grow and deepen so that we can see the opportunities you actually give us and respond to them as you would do.

LETTING GOD'S LIGHT SHINE THROUGH US

A reflection developed from a Letter of St. Ambrose

We are all familiar with the Gospel story about Jesus and the healing of a person who had been blind from birth. Jesus was passing by and noticed this person; Jesus didn't overlook him, or those who need the light only He can give. Neither should we overlook what Jesus did nor the fact that Jesus thought such a person was worthy of attention.

The starting point for our reflection is that this person was born blind. Now there are types of blindness, many caused by a serious illness that obscures vision—as cataracts do. These can be cured by surgical treatment. If one removes what is getting in the way of vision then the blindness is ended. There are other forms of blindness that can't be cured surgically but only by the power of God. What is natural is defective and only the creator of Nature can set it right.

Jesus says, *“As long as I am in the world I am the light of the world”*. This means that through Jesus all who are blind are offered the ability to “see”, if they draw near the Light of the World and if they see this is Jesus. Initially, all of us were without faith and blind. We needed to go to Jesus in order to receive sight and become able to “see”.

This means Jesus can bring human beings back to life. Jesus can restore people to health by a word of command. Jesus said to Lazarus, *“Come out!”*, and Lazarus came from his tomb. Jesus said to a paralytic, *“Arise and pick up your stretcher”*, and the person rose and picked up the very bed that had been used to carry him; he was no longer a helpless cripple. So what is Jesus telling us when he spits on the ground, mixes his spittle with the earth and puts it on a blind person's eyes? What does he mean when he says *“Go and wash yourself in the pool called Siloam”*?

God made mankind out of clay and now he remakes us in Jesus. In Jesus we see both the power of divinity and the strength of holiness. As divine light Jesus touches us and enlightens us. He does this by sending us to the pool of baptism. These are things Jesus does for us as he leads us through forty days of fasting and prayer. He gives us sight to see all the saving deeds he wishes us to do with him and in his power. Jesus is telling us, *“The night is almost over and the day is at hand”*. What sort of day? It is a day of grace and mercy.

God calls us to be instruments of grace and of mercy. We are to help others recover the sight that will show them God's merciful love. This is what leads everyone to life's fullness. We need only walk with Jesus to be a part of this miracle.

MERCY & THE GIFT OF INWARD CONVERSION

A reflection taken from a sermon by Bishop Alonzo Orozco

What did you take away with you from Sunday's sermon? On hearing how the Pharisees treated the healed blind man did you resolve to imitate Jesus? He sought the man out and enlightened his faith: "Do you believe in the Son of God? You have seen him and it is he who is speaking to you." How utterly to be praised and astonishing is the mercy of Jesus Christ! He made himself known to the sinful Samaritan woman and to one who had been a blind beggar, but he didn't open the mystery of God's mercy revealed in him to haughty priests or angry Pharisees. Is that a sufficient lesson for us?

O Lord, you have hidden deep things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to little ones, for so it pleases you, Heavenly Father! The secrets of God are hidden from insolence and pride but revealed to humility. O splendid and most desirable humility. Even if father and mother had abandoned us the Lord receives us and lifts us up. The man born blind could have used these very words. Knowing God's mercy one could wish that brothers, parents, friends and relatives would abandon us so that Christ might take us into his arms and embrace us! More, let all creatures be against us and attack us, provided only that our King, the creator of the universe, receive us with kindness and show himself to us.

Blessed Augustine says: "*Christ now washes the face of the man born blind by putting faith into his heart so that he might heal an entire person and on the Sabbath*". The man he heals isn't ungrateful. He falls down before Christ Jesus and worships him. Just as the Magi prostrated and adored Christ as he lay in the manger, just as they opened their treasures and gave him gifts with mystical meaning as symbols of our holy faith, so this man humbly prostrated himself and worshiped Christ as Son of God.

So what can we do except fall at Christ's feet and adore and worship him with the utmost awe and gratitude. We ask only that his grace illumine the eyes of our minds and hearts. We ask only that when death comes to us we may see Christ's glory, face to face. We now see him obscurely, as if in a mirror. But let us honor him because he is transforming us inwardly by giving us sight of the mysteries of God that we may belong to him and to our Heavenly Father now and forever. Let us show one another the love and mercy which God has shown us in Jesus Christ.

THE FOOD WE NEED TO BEAR OUR CROSS

A reflection developed from a homily by St. Augustine of Hippo

We are in the midst of our Lenten observance and it is vital that we find nourishment for our minds and hearts while we fast in a bodily way. It is not simply a matter of the discomfort of fasting but of the spiritual food we need to bear our cross with Christ all through our life. This is something we remind ourselves of by our Lenten penances. In a sense one crucifies oneself by denying one's natural desires simply because we want to belong more and more completely to Christ, even Christ crucified.

A Christian is beset with many temptations, as though hanging on a cross from life's beginning to its end. It is not for us to be rid of the nails, and especially in a mystical sense. The Psalmist says: *Pierce my flesh with the nails of your fear!* The word 'flesh' refers to our bodily desires and the word 'nails' to what God's justice requires of us, especially in caring for one another. The fear of the Lord must pierce us and fix us to the cross of Christ, which becomes our cross as well as his.

St. Paul urges us on in these words: *"I appeal to you by the mercy of God to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God"*. This is the crucifixion of which Paul speaks when he says that he glories only in Christ. *"Far be it from me to glory in anything except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world"*. This is the crucifixion that must continue throughout our lives and not just for forty days.

The reason why Moses, Elijah and our Lord fasted for forty days is that we might learn from them—that is from the Law and the prophets and the Gospel itself—not to imitate the ways of the world. They teach us to go on crucifying the unregenerate person within us so we may put on Christ instead. Christians must always live in this way, without any wish to be rid of their cross, otherwise they will sink into the world's mire and perish. But if we have to do this all our lives we must make an even greater effort during these days of Lent. This time must be an epitome of our entire life—both in the way we treat ourselves and in the way denying ourselves sets us free to help one another in every sort of need.

To find the strength for this we need the nourishment of God's Word. We find it in constant meditation. This word sets us free. Our freedom is seen in our ability to forget ourselves and seek only Christ and the good of all Christ's members. To love Christ is to love Christ's members. It is our work all through life; it crucifies & transforms us.

HOW PEOPLE COME TO SEE GOD

A reflection developed from a Letter of St. Theophilus of Antioch

Suppose someone says: “Show me your God”. There is only one way to reply: “Look at how I live and you will see God”. But seeing God in one’s way of life requires a cleansed inward eye that can see the goodness of loving mercy. Bodily eyes ordinarily can observe what is happening around us. At a glance notes the difference between light and darkness, white and black, beauty and deformity, symmetry and the lack of it, excess and deficiency. Likewise, by the sense of hearing one can distinguish between sounds. What holds for outward eyes and ears holds for the inward eyes of the heart and mind and soul. It is by them one sees God.

God is seen when the inward eyes are opened. All have eyes but if they are damaged or veiled by cataracts one can’t see light. The blind can’t see the sun but that doesn’t mean there is no sunlight. Their inability results from a deficiency in their eyes. That is how it is with inward eyes. They may be made blind by one’s sins and misdeeds. As a mirror needs to be cleaned of dust if one is to see clearly in it, we have to be cleansed of sins and misdeeds if the image of God is to be seen in us.

We can be cured of inward blindness if we have the will to put ourselves into the hands of Christ, the physician. He can open the inward eyes just as an ordinary doctor can open our outward eyes by surgery. Are you in doubt about Christ’s ability to do this? You can’t doubt God can do this, for he created all that is. Through Christ, God’s Word and Wisdom, God wills to heal all and give all life. God created the universe through the Word, as Scripture says—Even the heavens were made by God’s Word.

God, God’s wisdom, is all-powerful. If you understand this, and if you live a holy and upright life, you will be able to see God within yourself and so will others to whom God gives the inward eyes to see. Faith and the fear of God must find a place in a person’s heart and mind for this to happen. This is done by showing love and mercy as Christ does.

The goal is that when the time comes for each of us to lay aside mortality and put on immortality, we will be fit to receive the gift of seeing God fully. God will raise up our bodies and make them immortal, but God also raises up our inward self so we can see him face to face. As we become immortal we are becoming able to see the immortal. That is the purpose of the observances of Lent. Imitate Christ in your life, imitate his love and mercy, and you will be transformed inwardly from mortality to immortality and become able to see God as God is and live a life that is everlasting joy.

PRAYER BRINGS US TOGETHER AND TO GOD

A reflection from a Commentary on Second Corinthians by St. John Chrysostom

God often seems to be won over by many people praying together and refusing to give up until they are heard. Are we eager to be heard? Then let's cultivate communal prayer. Let's pray for one another as the early Christians prayed for the apostles. This will actually fulfill a command and it will stimulate our love. When I say 'love' I include everything good that leads us toward God. And if we find we have been heard then we shall also learn to be more earnest in thanksgiving.

When people give thanks for the blessings given, not only to them but to others, they imitate the Lord Jesus. Think also of David. In one of the Psalms he says, "Come, magnify the Lord with me! Let us all praise his name together". This is what St. Paul urges in all his letters. Shouldn't it be our practice too? Let us proclaim God's blessings to everyone. Let us create a company, and companionship, of those who praise God.

When we experience anything good at the hands of other people our thanks and praise fills them with new zeal for doing such good. So how could we doubt that declaring God's benefits will fail to increase the favors he showers upon us? If when we have been well treated by other human beings we urge our friends to join us in thanking them, surely we should be even more enthusiastic in leading others to join us in praising and thanking God.

We can begin by asking the saints to give thanks on our behalf. That will help us do the same on behalf of one another. This seems to me to be the greatest of all good works and a task that belongs to us especially because of the priesthood we have been given by being joined to Jesus Christ in baptism. When we approach God let's begin by giving thanks for the entire world and all the good things that fill it and are given us to share in common. We receive God's gifts together with others, and this is true even of our personal salvation. So we ought to give thanks together, both for our own particular blessings and for the blessings all share together.

Often the blessings we receive are due to other people's way of living. If there had been only ten just persons in Sodom the whole town would have been saved. Let's give thanks, then, for the gifts of justice and holiness we find in others, and for the confidence they show us in approaching God. We have been given so many good examples. What limit can we place on our thanks? To imitate Christ is to live the joy that only hope can bring.