

March 22, 2020 10:00 a.m.

Mother of Mercy Chapel (live-streamed)

Fourth Sunday of Lent Laetare Sunday

(1st Sunday of Diocesan-wide suspension of public Masses)

I think it's safe to say that most of us are seeing the world, and our own lives, in a whole new way these days. And if we were going to use the old "glass" analogy, we might be seeing the glass as "half-empty".

First of all, we're NOT able to be together for Mass.....

And just about every other area of our lives have been temporarily put "on hold". So, we might tend to focus on everything that we're restricted from doing: work, travel, shopping, socializing.

But if we could look at that glass and see it as half-full, maybe there's a way to look at our current life circumstances more positively as well. While there's a lot that we can't do, perhaps this crisis is providing us with time to do all those things that we might want to do, but normally don't have time to do. And, from a spiritual perspective, that can include providing us with more time to spend with one another and with God in prayer..

And since this time of self-imposed restrictions and not being able to get to Mass comes during this time of Lent, which is all about "returning to the Lord", perhaps we are presented with a great opportunity to focus more positively on our spiritual relationships as well.

Today is the Fourth Sunday of Lent---the Sunday which the Church also calls "Laetare Sunday", which means this is the Sunday to Rejoice! I look forward to this Sunday every Lent because this Sunday signals that we are past the half way point of our six-week Lenten Season, and coming down the home-stretch to the great Feast of Easter.

Once again, however, because of everything going on around us, we might not feel like there's much to "rejoice" about. But, what if we could see things, like this half-filled glass---more positively.

While we have no idea what the next 3 weeks will bring, and while it's certainly possible that we might experience Easter in a very different way than what we'd want it to be (if we're still under restrictions or other limitations), NOTHING takes away from the fact that Easter IS Easter!

All these weeks of Lent, and actually the whole Church Year, leads us to celebrate the Joy of Easter, and the fact that Easter has given us every reason to stop seeing our lives with a “glass half-empty” attitude, and has given us every reason to see life from a “glass” that not only half-filled, but overflowing because of what Jesus has done to destroy the power of sin and death. EASTER is why we “Rejoice”! And Easter remains for us our Hope, even on this very unusual Laetare Sunday 2020 when we can’t get out to come to Mass.

God’s Holy Word toeday gives us many reasons to be filled with Hope. We heard in today’s First Reading that Samuel was sent by God to Bethlehem, to the Home of Jesse, to anoint one of Jesse’s sons as the new King. The problem was that Jesse had 8 sons. Samuel assumed that the oldest son was the one; but that’s when God told Samuel: *“Do not judge from appearances; not as man sees does God see, because man sees the appearance, but the Lord looks into the heart.”*

As it turns out, God had chosen the youngest of the sons---the one least likely to have ever been considered by anyone else---as the one chosen to be King. Of course, that was David whom Samuel anointed as God’s chosen one, and it would be of him and his House that Jesus would eventually be born

How do we judge circumstances? When we only look at, and make judgments about, the circumstances of the world around us from our purely human perspective, may very well miss what God wants us to see.

And so, an important question to ask ourselves today would be: What does God want us to see in the situations of our lives? What does God want us to see in the current circumstances we’re all dealing with right now?

In today’s Gospel---our very long Gospel---we heard another powerful story of Jesus encountering the man that we know only as “the man born blind”. Remember the details of this miraculous encounter:

Jesus and His disciples are walking along the road, see the young blind man begging by the side of the road, and they begin discussing with one another and with Jesus his blindness---why and how he was blind.

Jesus goes up to the man----Remember, the young man didn’t ask for anything; he was just minding his own business begging by the side of the road-----makes a concoction of dirt mixed

with his own saliva into a kind of clay, and (as St. John tells us) “smears the clay onto his eyes, and said to him, ‘Go wash in the Pool of Siloam.’” (And John adds: “Siloam means ‘Sent’.”)

All of a sudden, this young man, who up until then was a “nobody”, can not only SEE, but he becomes embroiled in a huge controversy that involves the Pharisees, the crowds, his parents.

As the young man explains over and over what happened, he doesn’t say that Jesus “smeared dirt and spit on my eyes”; no, he says: “*This Man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes....and I was able to see.*” This man was chosen---“anointed”---by Jesus to “see” Him for Who He is!

And most importantly, he goes from referring to Jesus as “*that man*” to “*a Prophet*” to “*a Man of God*”, and finally, he proclaimed Him as “*Lord*”, saying: “*I do believe, Lord*” and John adds: “*and he worshipped Him*”.

So, another important question to ask ourselves today is: How is my spiritual vision?---Am I able to “see” with the eyes of Faith the world around us, the people with whom we live, and the circumstances of our lives, even during this time of crisis?

Seeing with the “eyes of Faith” is what Samuel was challenged to do in today’s first Reading when God reminded him that we can’t judge from the appearances of reality around us; as God looks beyond appearances and into each person’s heart and loves them--all of us--with an unconditional love, we too are challenged to see as God sees.

What happened to that young blind/now able to see man happened to each of us as well. It happened on the day of our Baptism, when we were reborn into the Life of Christ which gave us the spiritual ability to see with the “eyes of Faith”.

What happened to this “man born blind” was also a kind of re-birth----he was actually given two miracles: the first gave him the ability to see the world around him which he had never seen before; but in the second miracle, he was also “anointed”---chosen--- to see Jesus as not just a “prophet” or a “man of God”, but as his Lord, and the One Who would save him, and all of us, from our sins..

That’s what St. Paul meant when he challenged the Ephesians, and us, in today’s Second Reading when he said: “*Live as children of light, for light produces every kind of goodness.*”

And that's what Jesus meant in today's Gospel when He said just before curing the young man born blind: *"We have to do the works of the One Who sent Me.....While I am in the world, I am the Light of the world."*

There are certainly those who might look at our world in these days and see nothing but "darkness". But I invite all of us, on this day when the Church calls us to "Rejoice", instead to choose to see the world filled with the Light of Christ. That Light should be shining forth from the lives of all of us who proclaim Him as our Lord, as the young-now-able-to-see-with-the-eyes-of-faith man did.

We don't know what happened to this young man. He is never mentioned again. But I'd like to believe that he became one of Jesus' closest disciples and followed Him throughout the rest of his life, proclaiming the Good News of the miracles he received on that day when his half-empty glass was filled to overflowing.

May we do the same, both now during these challenging days, and beyond when the crisis has passed.. May we Rejoice always in Jesus, the Light of the World, who anoints us, and sends us forth to share the Good News with those who, when we see them with the eyes of Faith, are truly our sisters and brothers in Christ.

God bless you, now and always!