March 26, 2017

4th Sunday of Lent

1 Sm 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a
Eph 5:8-14
Jn 9:1-41

by Jacek Orzechowski, OFM

In today’s first reading, we read about God’s effort to enlist Samuel in his effort to replace Saul, the deposed king of Israel. However, Samuel soon finds out that to complete this task he must put aside his preconceived notions of kingship. The prophet soon learns that “man sees the appearance, the Lord looks into the heart.” At the end, only the least likely candidate meets God’s standard.

Rather than offer a scholarly exegesis, I seek to share some insights about the challenges each of us face in discovering what God intends.

As we listen to the account of David’s coming to power, we are invited to think about our own baptism. Each one of us has been anointed with the sacred oil, as Christ was anointed Priest, Prophet and King. This commission calls us to share in the joys, hopes, and anguish of others. Our baptism is as a call to action. We frequently do not think of ourselves as being up to the task. Yet, God thinks otherwise. And, who are we to argue with God?

Called to preach on this reading, you should first consider the least likely. Consider speaking with a “Dreamer,” an undocumented young adult who came to this country as a child and who is now a courageous advocate for immigration reform. If you don’t know one, turn to the Internet. There you will find powerful examples of how God calls the unlikely people and anoints them with vision and passion. For homily material, you may also want to check out the Young Voices for the Planet 7-minute video featuring several inspirational children leaders http://www.youngvoicesonclimatechange.com/youth-climate-videos/save-tomorrow/

In choosing David, God purposely passed over the A-list candidates. We need to do the same.

The second reading from the Letter of St. Paul to the Ephesians “illuminates” our baptismal commitment. We are to “live as children of light…. in goodness, righteousness and truth (and) expose the works of darkness.” Moving beyond a merely individualist morality, we are to read signs of the times. At the time in our nation’s history where the basic notions of truth is debated and questioned, we need to remember that the values of goodness, righteousness and truth are not peripheral in the Bible. Rather, they represent core religious values. These must never yield to partisan advantage or political expediency.

A contemporary examination of conscience should find us asking: how serious an effort have I made to “expose the works of darkness?” What have I done when immigrants are demonized? When faced with overt racism, has my response been silence? How seriously
do I take my commitment to a sustainable environment? When I preach, am I willing to take on the issues that matter, even though they might be controversial? When I preach, do I hide behind purely Biblical exegesis or dwell largely on me-and-Jesus spirituality that fails to speak truth-to-power? This passage from St. Paul’s letter echoes the prophet Isaiah who lamented the complacency of the shepherds of Israel who have become like “mute dogs unable to bark,” too comfortable and unwilling to do what it takes to protect the sheepfold. (Isaiah 56:10-12)

In the Gospel of John, we encounter the familiar themes of light and darkness. It tells story of a blind beggar whose sight Jesus restores. However, this act is perceived as a serious threat to the powers-that-be. In fact, the former blind beggar pays the price when he is ostracized. We should ask ourselves, how does this story play out in our day and age, at the individual or collective level? Just a few examples to suggest:

1. Consider telling a personal story about having your eyes opened in regard to the issue of immigration, climate change, or universal health care. Who was Jesus for you who opened your eyes? Share the details.

2. One of the fundamental challenges facing American Catholics centers on our inability to see how various political, social, economic, ecological and cultural issues are interconnected. Focusing exclusively on the evil of abortion in fact “cheapens” all other life-issues. Our approach to life issues needs to be a seamless garment. You might tell the story of how you learned to connect-the-dots between moral issues. In John’s Gospel, Jesus used the clay of the earth and his saliva to restore the sight of the blind beggar. What contemporary elements restored your sight?

3. You could share a story of a DREAMER or one of the kids featured in the “Young Voices” – or another exceptional youth leader in your parish or ministry – who has helped you to see an “old” issue with new eyes, a secular concern with the eyes of Faith.

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