

## 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent A April 3, 2011 – Fr. Gerald Haemmerle

John Milton, the greatest 17<sup>th</sup> century English poet, went totally blind when he was only 44 years old. Some years later he wrote the sonnet *On His Blindness*. He begins with “When I consider how my light is spent / E’re half my days, in this dark world and wide, / And that one Talent which is death to hide, / Lodg’d with me useless.” He goes on to say “God doth not need / Either man’s work or his own gifts, who best / Bear his milde yoke, they serve him best.” He concludes by saying “They also serve who only stand and waite.

Our readings today are about blindness. What a wonderful gift our eyes are, the gift of sight. What a wonderful gift the beauty of a snow covered field is, or the blossoms of spring, the face of a loved one, the smile of a little child. To lose the ability to see these things as Milton did was a great cross to bear, to never have been able to see them, like the blind man in the gospel, is an even heavier cross.

Jesus enters the picture. Out of compassion he heals the man, making clay with saliva, smearing the clay on his eyes, and sending him to the Pool of Siloam to wash. He is able to see. The story could have ended there, but the more important story follows, the story of the man getting spiritual sight. He is questioned by his neighbors, by the Pharisees a number of times, his parents are questioned. He first referred to Jesus as “the man called Jesus”, then “a prophet”, and finally he believes that Jesus is “the Son of Man.” His growing in faith is very similar to the coming to faith of the Samaritan woman in last Sunday’s gospel. The Pharisees, who had their physical sight, become more and more blind.

The other readings also deal with a kind of blindness. In the first reading both Jesse and Samuel judge by physical appearance, but the Lord said “Not as man sees does God see, because man sees the appearance, but the Lord looks into the heart.” How often we judge by appearance and worldly success, instead of looking into the heart. In the second reading we read “You were once darkness, but now you are light in the world.”

At an earlier mass today those in the RCIA process took another step in their journey to full communion in the church. There are 35 people entering the church this Easter here at St. Charles. Over the course of this past year, through study, prayer, and experiences, they have grown in their knowledge and love of the Lord. They have moved from blindness to sight.

That is what everyone of us is called to do, to continue to move from blindness to spiritual sight. I quote from Emilie Giffin’s book *Small Surrenders*. She said “There are many slow days when nothing seems to be happening.” How true that is. We are more aware of it during Lent, aware of our failings, our imperfections. We want to see more clearly, we want to draw closer to the lord, but we seem to make such little progress. We envy the Catechumens, who seem on fire with faith and love of the lord. Emilie Griffin then says “A lot of the Christian life develops underground when we aren’t looking.” Grace, our relationship with God, is nurtured by time and devotedness. We must be patient, as God is patient with us.

I return to John Milton. He was a man very committed to the Lord who wanted to do so much for God. And he lost his sight, and feared that he could never serve the Lord as he had dreamed. But he learned to be patient, to accept the will of God, the divine plan in his life. He learned that “They also serve who only stand and waite.” It is interesting that Milton wrote his two greatest works, *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, many years after he became blind.

To gain spiritual sight, we must learn the lessons that Milton learned, we must learn to be patient, to surrender our wills to God, to see God present in our ordinary lives. Then we will come to realize that we “also serve who only stand and waite.”