

4th Sunday of Lent Laetare (Rejoicing) Sunday A 2020

Being shut out from the eucharist is a form of social distancing making it very difficult for us to rejoice in any shape or form. But all is not doom and gloom or reason for despondency. This year we are being given a concrete experience of the real consequences of sin by this new virus. Sin isolates and cuts people off from each other - even our loved ones, and, in certain extreme case, takes away life completely. It helps us understand more clearly, therefore, why Jesus came to save us from sin and all its effects and to realise how much Jesus wants life for us to the full. Jesus faced sin head on and embraced it in its worst form so that he could wring life out of it – a life he offers to us all. In the face of this virus, people are facing up to it throughout the world by reaching out to those in need, to those who have had to isolate themselves and offer them life through the help and support and pure neighbourly love they offer them. These are the people who inspire hope in us all. They show us concretely that Jesus' death and resurrection was not only justified but bears fruit a plenty. Isn't this a good reason for us to rejoice??

In yesterday's gospel Jesus called us to be humble, in other words he calls us to recognise that we are made from the earth and that our life and our gifts are given to us through the generous love of God. In healing the blind man what does Jesus do first? He takes some earth and mixes his spittle with it. In a more poetic way this is very similar to what he did with us. God made us humble. The blind man washes and sees. We too were washed in baptismal waters at the invitation of Jesus. The blind man receives more than sight, he receives a belief - a belief in Jesus who he eventually discovers is the Messiah. The blind man washes in the pool of Siloam which we are told means *sent*. This is why the blind man receives more than just the gift of life and the gift of faith. He also receives a wisdom and understanding that enables him to go and teach those who do not want to accept that he was blind and more especially did not want to accept that it was Jesus who healed him.

Through the washing in the Baptismal waters, we are given new life and faith and, like the blind man, we, too, have received a wisdom and knowledge to help us to lead others into the truth.

We also know that this blind man was shunned by society because he was seen as the offspring of someone or a family that had sinned i.e. the socially excluded. How often do we not listen to those who do not fit in, the marginalised and the excluded and miss hearing the truth? How often are we imprisoned by our customs and traditions that blind us from seeing the truth because it is too different, or we do not want to feel foolish or admit we are wrong? We have life and we have faith but do we have true sight????? Is it possible that Jesus called us to reach out to the poor, the excluded and the marginalised because we have important truths to learn from them - for our good, therefore, as well as for theirs? It is uncomfortable to admit to being wrong, it is scary to know how to respond. The blind man in the story would have felt the same but he showed courage and wisdom and truth - a truth that eventually leads him back to Jesus and evokes within him wonder, praise and thanksgiving. He gives glory to God. And this is certainly a reason to REJOICE!!