

Fourth Sunday of Lent A (2020)

1 Samuel 16.1b,6-7,10-13

Ephesians 5:8-14

John 9:1,6-9, 13-17,34-38

“He said, ‘Lord, I believe.’ And he worshipped him.”

A priest friend of mine – he is no longer alive now – told me one day shortly after I was ordained, “*Joe, the longer you are a priest, the more you will be humbled by the faith that you will find around you every day.*” And, as has been the case with everything that he ever told me, I have come to see the truth of that statement too.

And I learned it again a few weeks ago. I was asked to go to the hospital to say the “*Prayers for the Dying*”. I knew the man involved, but not very well and not for very long. He realized that he was dying; he had told me that in previous conversations. And, as I entered his room, I saw that some of his family were gathered there with him – and they were in tears. His wife approached me and said, “*Father, he has been told that he has just a couple of hours to live.*”

Breathing and speaking were not easy for him, but he was fully conscious. In a frail voice, he thanked me for coming and tried to make The Sign of the Cross, as we began to pray. He then closed his eyes. When I completed the prayers, he whispered clearly, “*Amen*”. And he spoke that word in a way that did not sound like a mere formality. Rather, it seemed to me to be the most profound Profession of Faith that I have ever heard. His face was calm and serene, as he stared death straight in the face. That elderly priest had told me years ago that I would be humbled, and I have never felt more so. Within an hour, that man, indeed, gone to his God; and his

dying word came to my mind, as I read those words of the Gospel ...

“He said, ‘Lord, I believe.’ And he worshipped him.”

For that same kind of total faith seems to have blessed the man in this Gospel. He has been born blind and has grown to adulthood without ever having seen the light of day. Then our Lord comes, opens his eyes and gives him sight. It should have been a moment of great joy for everyone around him – but it is not so. The enemies of our Lord are so offended by this man who, they say, does not observe the Sabbath, that they try to prove that this miracle never happened. And, when that does not work, they try to explain the miracle away. And, when that does not work, they try confuse the man about what did happen.

But this man is not swayed. He may be unable to answer the religious questions posed by the doubters, but his response is classic and clear. He says, in effect, *“I cannot answer all your question about this man – who he is or how he works. All that I know is that I was blind, and now I can see. I believe.”*

Centuries may separate the man in this Gospel from the man lying on his back in that hospital room a few weeks ago. But they are both telling exactly the same story; they are both teaching the same lesson. It is a lesson of total faith, which permitted them both to cope, when nothing else could help.

And there are, I suspect, a good number in this church at this moment who are able to name someone whose strength of faith has humbled and inspired them at

difficult moments in their own lives. In fact, some of us are likely here this evening (morning) because of their example, an example which they may never have known that they had given us. And this Gospel then becomes, among other things, a moment to reflect in gratitude on the example of their faith which has brought us to this day. These people gave us so much; may we remember them by name today. This Gospel invites us to such reflection – and to a prayer of gratitude for them .

And this Gospel also does something else. It challenges us to reflect on our own faith too. As we work our way through this Lent, it invites each of us ever so gently to ask one basic question: and it is this: Am I giving to my faith the time, the interest, the energy, which will permit me to say with conviction, “*Amen*”, on that day when the “*Prayers of the Dying*” are said for me?

And, finally, this. My faith may be strengthened by prayers that I will say and by homilies that I may hear. But I must always remember that my faith is most nourished when I live it in my home, at my work and on the street. The words of Saint John Chrysostom come to mind. He warned: “*If you cannot find Christ in the beggar at the church door, you will not find him in the chalice, either.*”

Those, I think, are the lessons taught by that dying man in the hospital room and by those words of the Gospel ...

“He said, ‘Lord, I believe.’ And he worshipped him.”