



Fourth Sunday of Lent April 3, 2011 A

THE MOVEMENT FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT AND FROM LIGHT TO DARKNESS

During these Lenten weeks of Cycle A, we are in the process of reading three powerful gospels, each of which relates to Baptism. Last week's Gospel was about the Living Water which is poured into our souls at Baptism. This week's Gospel speaks about the journey from the darkness of unbelief to belief. As we gladly witness the physically blind man come to belief about Jesus, we sadly watch the physically sighted Pharisees move into disbelief.

Seeing as God sees

In today's first reading from 1 Samuel, we read these words: "Not as mortals see does God see, because mortals see the appearances, but the Lord looks into the heart." Reflecting on this verse and on a verse from the second reading and Gospel, Alice Camille writes:

Are you beguiled by the celebrity look? It's hard not to be drawn to those beautiful faces on magazine covers in the checkout line. Pretty people make a living marketing their best features. But that tells us nothing about the contents of their hearts or the state of their interior world. Frequent trips to rehab centers and hospitals tell us more about what's under the surface than what we might guess from designer clothes and camera-ready smiles.

In a similar way, Jesse markets his older sons to the prophet Samuel, presuming these hulking lads will find favor with God. Samuel is tempted by their impressive appearance, but waits on the youngest, David, before making his discernment. Sometimes seeing clearly has nothing to do with what meets the eye.

· What do you look for in a leader?

"Awake, O sleeper, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light." (2nd reading)

It's possible to be a thoroughly good and intelligent person and to be totally clueless about the direction your life is taking. Many of us get caught up in the dynamic of events around us and start to drift with the current rather than choosing our path more deliberately. Careers seem to have a life of their own,

and once we start climbing a ladder, it's hard to stop or to assess its destination. Material goals, like upgrading our lifestyle or saving for the future, also become self-perpetuating ends. Relationships can take on the circular pattern of hamsters running on a wheel, expending a lot of energy but getting nowhere. The time-honored way to gain perspective about our lives is to step aside in retreat and recollection. The light of Christ can illuminate any darkness.

· What spiritual habits assist you in regularly assessing the direction of your life?

It's no crime to wake up one day and realize you've been oblivious to a great truth about yourself. What IS a crime is never to wake up and make that discovery. The wise folks we know get that way by walking a while on the path of humility, encountering brutal truths about themselves all along the way. They've confronted their own blindness many times, and surrendered to the sometimes-painful procedure of having their sight restored again and again. Being human implies a limited perspective. We don't see perfectly, and we have to keep working at clarifying our vision. Honest relationships assist that process naturally. So does surrendering to the words of Scripture and the sacraments most deliberately. Confession helps. The only thing that harms us, frankly, is refusing to see.

· What relationships, experiences or things have helped to open the inner eyes of your soul?

How Starbucks Saved My Life

Michael Gill had it all: a childhood of privilege, a Yale education, a big house in the suburbs, a loving family, and a top job at a New York advertising agency with a high six-figure salary. Then it all came crashing down: he was downsized from his job; his consulting business failed; an affair ended his marriage and alienated his children; he was diagnosed with a slow-growing brain tumor. Sixty-four years old, Gill had no money, no health insurance, no prospects.

One day, Gill sat in a Manhattan Starbucks to enjoy his last affordable luxury—a latte—brooding over his wreck of a life. Out of the blue, the manager of the Starbucks, a 28-year-old African-American woman named Crystal, half-jokingly offered him a job. With no other prospects, Gill took it.

*It was the beginning of a professional and personal transformation for Michael Gill. He writes about it in his book **How Starbucks Saved My Life**.*

For the first time in his life, Gill was a minority—the only older white guy working with a team of young African-Americans. He was forced to acknowledge his ingrained prejudices and admit to himself that, far from being beneath him, his new job was hard. And his new coworkers, despite having half the education and twice the challenges in life than he had ever faced, were running circles around him.

But as the other baristas treated him with respect and kindness, Gill began to feel a new emotion: gratitude. With his defenses down and his sense of entitlement stripped away, a humbler, happier and gentler Michael Gill remained.

The title of his book is not hyperbole: Starbucks saved Michael Gills' life. He has found "magic" in serving people and a joy in working with others. He has reconciled with his children. He is happier in his little attic walkup than he ever was in his 25-room house. Gill writes:

I traded in my pin-striped for a green apron, a Master of the Universe costume for something that said I was there to serve—not to rule. I wasn't some know-it-all authority, a pompous lifeguard ordering people around on a beach. I was just another swimmer, now riding a wave I'd never known existed. ...The gentle love and peace and happiness I felt now I had never experienced before. Maybe the mistakes I had made—causing so much damage—had also helped me to break out of my comfortable cocoon...to get out to a world so much more full of light and life.

Michael Gill and Nicodemus are both well connected, accomplished men who discover that there remains something unfulfilled in their lives. Despite our own life's experience, wealth and status, we are incomplete and lost until we are "reborn in water and the Spirit": to be immersed in the Gospel principles of justice and reconciliation, to be transformed by God's spirit of humility and compassion. The kingdom of God that Jesus speaks of in the Gospel transcends boundaries and labels, stereotypes and traditions, economic status and skin color. In God's eyes, we are all his children; in God's heart, we are all brothers and sisters to one another. May we experience the grace that Michael Gill experienced in his new life at Starbucks; may we rediscover God's love in the love of family and friends and coworkers; may we embrace a new perspective of gratitude for all we have received from God—blessings we may not even realize we have received.

Even though Jay Cormier wrote the above piece to connect with how Nicodemus (Jn 3) came into the light,

it fits in nicely with today's Gospel. Gill's experience at Starbucks was truly an eye-opening experience for him.

Lenten Penance Service this Tuesday

Many of you will receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation between now and Easter Sunday; many of you will not. Some of you have not received the Sacrament for five, ten or twenty+ years. Many Saturdays throughout the year we have parishioners come to confession who have not done it for a long, long time. I believe *every one* of them leaves delighted to have come.

While we do, in fact, most of the time confess our sins **directly** to God, it has been a part of Catholic practice to also confess occasionally to a priest. In his chapter on confession in **Rediscover Catholicism**, Matthew Kelly states that he normally goes to confession during the first week of each month. Why? Because confession helps him to become the best version of himself. He writes:

*The **journey toward the best-version-of-yourself** is also **journey away** from the defects of the **present-version-of-yourself**. ...Confession has played a powerful role in helping me to strive to become the best-version-of-myself. ...People striving to excel in any area of life want to know their weaknesses so that they can overcome them. ...Confession is the perfect spiritual link to rekindle our passion for excellence in the spiritual life.*

Our lives change when our habits change. I have been convinced of the power of the habit of regular confession in my own life, and I would like to encourage you to make it a spiritual habit in your life."

Kelly continues: *Is once a year during Lent enough? Well, it's enough to fulfill your obligation, but that would be minimalism. Becoming the best-version-of-yourself and loving God are not about obligations and minimalism. When we are dedicated to these matters our aspirations soar far beyond the rules and regulations of our faith. These rules and regulations define only the lower limits of our quest, but God invites us to explore the optimum possibilities.*

Consider this analogy. How often do you wash your car, or have it washed? Perhaps once every two or three weeks, maybe once a month, but it is probably not ten years since you had your car washed! And when your car is all shiny and clean on the outside and clean and tidy on the inside, you feel pretty good about that. Driving a clean car feels different than driving a dirty car.

Have a blessed week,

Le. Saran