

LET THE LIGHT SHINE FORTH
A Sermon for Quinquagesima, 2011
On the Text: Propers for the Day
By the Reverend Doctor Randolph Constantine

Today is Quinquagesima, the last Sunday of our Pre-Lenten season of the three Sundays, whose names end in “gesima”. The name, Quinquagesima means *fiftieth* in Latin and is the only one of these three gesimas whose name is really correct. If you begin counting with today being numbered 1 and count until you get to Easter, you will find that Easter is gets the number 50. Quinquagesima is the fiftieth day before Easter and is always the seventh Sunday before Easter. Quinquagesima is not the last day of the Pre-Lenten season, but it is the day on which the Gospel lesson speaks of Jesus’ telling the twelve Apostles that it is time for Him to go to Jerusalem. Three days from now, on Ash Wednesday we shall turn in our annual spiritual journey into the solemnity of Lent, just as Jesus turned in his journeys of ministry and headed to Jerusalem.

Our Gospel lesson for today tells of that turning in Jesus’ journey, but we need to see that in that turning and heading to Jerusalem and the Cross, He did not stop ministering to the people, of healing them and of bringing the light of His message to them. Do you see what I just did, and I did it again in asking this question? I used a metaphor of vision. I said, “we need to see”, when I meant that we need to understand, we need to get the message. But seeing what He said is more than just seeing the words printed on a page or hearing it spoken by someone.

Let’s start by looking at just the beginning of the Gospel lesson. Either turn in your Bibles to Luke 18:31 or to page 123 of your Prayer books and read along with me. The first four verses say this in the modern English of the ESV of the Bible: Luke 18:31-34 **31 And taking the twelve, he said to them, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. 32 For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. 33 And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise." 34 But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said.**

Jesus is very clear in what he says. The first thing He says, is “See.”; but they don’t see at all. That fourth verse, verse 34, tells us, “they did not grasp what was said.” They didn’t get the message. Now it might help us to know where they were when Jesus said this. Nowhere in chapter 18 does St. Luke tell us where Jesus is when He said that, “We are going **up** to Jerusalem.” Having that word, *up*, in the sentence might be a hint. When we say we are going up to Denver, we do that because Denver is north of here, not because it is higher, which it isn’t. We might also say that, because Denver is the capital of Colorado and so, is more important than Pagosa Springs, or at least some people might think so. Now if you had read chapter 17 you would have seen that Jesus and the Apostles were in the region between Samaria and Galilee a little earlier. If we turn to the other Gospels, we find that Matthew and Mark tell the same story, although each tells it with some slight differences. St. Mathew tells it in chapter 20, verses 29-34 of his Gospel. He has it happen on the way *out* of Jericho and there are two blind men whom he

heals. St. Mark tells in chapter 10, verses 46-52 of his Gospel. He also says it happened on the way *out* of Jericho, but he tells of only one blind beggar, who is a man named Bartimaeus.

But what does our Gospel lesson say? Verse 35 tells us this: Luke 18:35 **35 And it came to pass, that as he was come nigh unto Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way side begging: "As He came nigh",** or in modern English, **"As He came near"** Jesus wasn't leaving Jericho; he was coming *toward* Jericho in St. Luke's story and he had gotten near to Jericho.

A partial explanation for these differences in details is given by St. John in the last verse of his Gospel where he says: John 21:25 **25 Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.** So it seems that there are really three stories of Jesus' giving sight to the blind and not just one. Whether there are 1, 2, 3, or 4 beggars healed of blindness on the way out of Jericho is not really important; what is important is that at least one was healed and that all of them were crying out some variation of, "Have mercy on me, Son of David!"

And that is important. I have mentioned to you more than once that when someone addresses Jesus as "Son of David", it is a recognition that Jesus is the Messiah. What this tells us is that the blind man actually sees deeper and further than do the Apostles. Even they at some points were spiritually blind, even St. Peter, such as when shortly after Peter had confessed to Jesus in Matthew 16:16, that he thought Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, then Jesus told the disciples the first time of all that would happen to him in Matthew 16:21-23: **21 From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. 22 And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." 23 But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."** At times, they were all thick-headed, just as was the rich man who asked Jesus what he had to do to "inherit eternal life" and was told by Jesus to sell all and give to the poor in Mark 10:17-22 and in Luke 18: 18-23. This man is often described a "the rich young man", but in neither story is he called young. Luke describes him as a ruler, and both Luke and Mark describe him as being "extremely rich", or as "having great possessions". The rich man was spiritually blind enough that he could not see giving away his riches in order to gain eternal life." But the Holy Spirit had given the blind man the sight to see that Jesus had the power to give him his physical sight.

This spiritual sight is the true enlightenment, the sight given to us by the Holy spirit that enables us to see truth of the Word of God and to use that Word to guide us through this life. Having this sort of sight is like the difference between someone who has perfect ordinary vision and can see all of the colors of the rainbow as compared to someone who can all the regular colors and also see infra-red and ultraviolet as colors outside of the normal spectrum of colors. The ability to see this spiritual light can come only as a gift from the Holy Spirit.

This ability is not really an ability to see some sort of physical light that ordinary people cannot see; it is the ability to *see* the message in what has been said by God in His holy Word, the Holy Bible; or ,in the case of those people who were there and heard what Jesus said, it is the

ability to understand what he said, to *get* His message. Last Sunday, the Gospel lesson told us that He gave the disciples the ability to understand parables. Jesus is not here to give us that ability, so how shall we get it? Who will give it to us?

Both Jesus and St. Paul give us the answer: It is the Holy Spirit who will give it to us. In John 14:23-26 we read of Jesus answering a question that Philip asked Him. **23 Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. 24 Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me. 25 "These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. 26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you."** Before Jesus said this, in chapter 6 of St. John's Gospel, in verse 44 he had said this: John 6:44 **44 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.** I don't know, and don't think there is any place in the Bible that tells us that God the Father speaks directly to people any more. It seems that all of God's messaging to us is done by the Holy Spirit. Yes, the Father spoke to all who were there when Jesus was baptized; and it was the Father who spoke to Peter, James, and John at the Transfiguration when He said: Mark 9:7 **7 And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him."** I can only think that after that Day of Pentecost that we shall celebrate 100 days from now, that when God has spoken to a person, it has been either through His holy Word, the Bible, or by the Holy Spirit.

As we read through the Book of Acts, we find that the ability to receive the Holy Spirit was transmitted by the Apostles and other disciples by Baptism, by the Laying on of Hands, and even by hearing the preaching of God's Word by the disciples. It doesn't matter how we receive the Holy Spirit, what matters is that we do receive Him, and then what happens after that. What is startling are the things that St. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 6:19, and in 2 Timothy 1:14. In 1 Corinthians 6:19 he says: **19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?**, while in 2 Timothy 1:14 he says: **14 By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.**

There is only one thing that we can draw from these quotes: that if anyone comes and wants to live forever with Jesus Christ and enjoy the glory of God, the Holy Spirit has already taken up residence within him. The Holy Spirit dwells within us! The light of Jesus Christ, the Light of the World shines on our path, and it is the Holy Spirit who gives us the ability to see that light, because we know there are people who cannot see that light and that path. There are many people whom we think of who could not see it: Adolph Hitler, Pol Pot, Joseph Stalin to name just a few. There are others less famous, and some who are unknown, maybe someone who lives down the street from you. Evil is an equal opportunity infection. Any person can have it, and only the Holy Spirit can cure it. The thing is, it can be cured, no matter how gross and obvious, or how hidden and subtle the infection is. Whether a person has committed horrible sins or just sins that seem to be rinky-dink and minor, a recognition of what one has done followed by a desire to repent and to be forgiven by God tells us that the Holy Spirit is there, changing that

person for the better, to make him, or her, to be more like a child of God, just as the Holy Spirit changed Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector in chapter 19 right after our lesson.

The Holy Spirit takes the scales off the eyes of the heart so that the person can see clearly in the light of Jesus Christ. When that process has continued for a while, the light of Christ begins to shine from within us. That light can never be as bright as the light from Jesus, but it can still help light the path for others.

Look at how Jesus cured the blind man of our Gospel lesson. He simply said: Luke 18:42 "Recover your sight; your faith has made you well." This time there was no spitting in the dirt and putting mud on him or even touching him; he simply spoke the words and it happened. Over the three years or so of his ministry, Jesus Christ had gone from hiding His power as God to showing more and more of it.

The story of the raising of Lazarus from the dead shows this. That story is told only in the Gospel of St. John, and we are not told how long it was between raising Lazarus and when he came up to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover that was the Day before He was crucified. However, we know it was not a long time, because the High priest was Caiaphas when Lazarus was raised, and plans were made that day to arrest Jesus soon after he came to Jerusalem for the Feast. You can read that in John 11:17-44, where in verse 43, all he did was to say, "Lazarus, come out!" He was letting his light shine even more brightly, the closer they came to the Crucifixion, and more people were seeing it and believing in Him.

Quinquagesima is a day on which we are given the message that we have received sight just as did he blind beggar, the enlightenment to see and understand the Word of God with eyes and ears that have been opened by the Holy Spirit. Once we understand this, we see that Jesus has given us a job to do, which is to spread the Gospel as far and as wide as we can. It is not for us to just come here each Sunday, hear the word of the Lord, and partake of his Holy Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. This is not Mission Impossible. Our job, if we accept it; and for our soul's sake, we had better accept it, is to spread the Gospel, as is said in the General Thanksgiving, "not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to Thy service and by walking before Thee in holiness and righteousness all our days."

The Holy Spirit lives within us, and the light of Christ is in our hearts. We are tasked with going forth and shining that light wherever we are, and mostly that *where* is right here in Pagosa Springs; but really, it is wherever we are. We need to carry the message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ wherever we go, to whomever we talk to. So let the light of Christ shine forth from you that others might see. Jesus came to be a light to lighten the Gentiles.

Let His light shine forth!

AMEN!