



LENT 4

THE NEW SHOFAR

***All the darkness in the world cannot extinguish
the light of a single candle.*** St. Francis of Assisi

Live as children of light,⁹ light produces every kind of goodness, righteousness and truth.

I wonder what was going on in the mind of Paul that he felt the necessity to write these words? I suspect he was finding himself in the midst of very human situations within the community. As we have in our own parishes today, we come together as children of the Light, men and women who have chosen to accept Christ as the one who enlightens every moment of our human existence. But we do not always use Christ as the enlightener.

As disciples of Christ, we commit ourselves to taking up the Christ into whom we were re-born at baptism, and using that Light to guide us through the multitude of “darknesses” that can so easily blight our lives and our communities. The image I have is of a torch. The only time we use a torch is when we are trying to negotiate our way through a dark room, or outside on a dark night. We want to, need to go somewhere but cannot see the best way to proceed because our night-vision is not up to the task. And so the torch. With the light of the torch we can avoid knocking into things, tripping over and avoiding every kind of disaster. We can get to where we want to be going because of the light.

Christ is God’s gift to us so that the world can be changed. USE HIM

This is what Paul is saying. Christ is the only way in which we as humans, in human communities, can find ourselves living in *goodness, righteousness and truth*. Without Christ’s guidance, teachings, advice and company, we fall short in all kinds of ways but particularly in our relationships with others. Without Christ we end up living in the opposite ways to *goodness, righteousness and truth*.

However, as it is with a torch, Christ has to be intentionally taken up and used. He is only light for us when we come to him, absorb him into the way we think, speak and act. A torch in the cupboard is useless for lighting our way. Christ left in the church, or in our bibles, or in our good intentions is never going to be of use to us. We have to choose Christ in these moments and apply Christ to everything. We have to live Christ by imitating his ways – with no exceptions. What does that mean in real life? Read the Sermon on the Mount. Live those commands (and not just demand everyone else live them) and darkness will never overcome us or the way we live in the world as we give witness to the Kingdom of Light. And unlike the physical torch, which can be switched on and off according to our needs and the level of darkness around us, the Light of Christ must be taken up and used, lived in each and every moment of our lives. Without Christ it is darkness that so easily envelopes our words, our deeds and in our interactions with others. Christ either enlightens and reveals himself in every moment of our lives or in none.

Hearing Jesus is crucial to seeing Jesus

Preachers are generally tempted to use this text to preach about the importance of spiritual sight, the gift of being able to “see” Jesus in the events of our own lives and in the way we are able to “see” Jesus in the others around us. But there is more to today’s gospel than just seeing.

When it comes to the recognition of Jesus, when the story of the blind man is heard along with its discourse, we should note the importance of hearing. In fact, the blind man first responds to Jesus’ voice. Jesus tells him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam.” The blind man heard and obeyed. He *hears* Jesus before he *sees* Jesus. The story also narrates his gradual growth in his seeing Jesus. He first of all saw Jesus as “the man called Jesus” (9:11) and then moved on to addressing him as “Lord”. The next step was worshipping him (9:38). In fact, in 9:37 Jesus himself reveals the importance of both sight and hearing when it comes to belief, *You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is that one.*

This Sabbath healing of the man born blind is the sixth sign Jesus offers in the Gospel of John. In this sign, Jesus identifies himself as *the light of the world*. Seeing and believing are directly aligned in this sign because the only way Jesus can truly be light for us is when we walk with him as our Lord and Saviour. The influential Pharisees can see physically but are blind because they do not recognise Jesus as the Messiah. They refuse to hear him. On the other hand, the poor and disabled man in the narrative starts out blind physically but is both sighted and enlightened: his sight is restored by Jesus and he believes who Jesus is.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the cure of Tobit’s blindness (Tobit 11: 7–14) is the only reported instance of such a miracle, but Tobit was not born blind. So, this sign in John’s gospel is an extraordinary event, which indicates that Jesus is the fulfilment of God’s covenant promises. He is the long-awaited Messiah, who will the saving works of God to a glorious end. But he has to be chosen and followed.

Live (an imperative) as children of the Light (St Paul)

Unlike the blind man, we cannot look directly into the face of Jesus, but we can recognise Jesus in the face of others. If we use the eyes of faith we can recognise Jesus embodied in: the teacher who sees potential in every student; in the parent who looks at their child with sheer delight; in the child who watches out for others, not just their friends. These are wonderful miracle moments and in them we celebrate the greatness of God. However, there is a more difficult dimension to notice and a more challenging reality to address. That is, our responsibility for the homeless person, the troubled or troublesome child, the old person who has outlived family and friends. It is on us, as Christians, to be the living witnesses of Christ, the ‘light of the world’, for them, to see and hear Christ in them.

If we cannot see Christ, hear Christ and experience Christ in these more difficult and even sinful children of God, then more than likely we are unable to see and hear Christ anywhere in the world. Christ is either everywhere, or he is nowhere, in everyone or in no one. As Christians we do not get to pick and choose.

This is the fourth week of Lent, a week in which it is time to be healed and to heal others.