

## Fourth Sunday of Lent

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

During my annual retreat last April, I had the opportunity to read *David: The Divided Heart* by David Wolpe. I have been captivated by the person and mystic of David much of my adult life and certainly as a priest. Like many, my only point of reference about David growing up was the biblical story of his slaying of Goliath. So, instinctively, David is a folk hero. As one of seven brothers, I was drawn to the strength and might David presented; he could defeat anyone, even one as giant as Goliath. Hopefully with some maturity, I have become drawn to the complexities and contradictions of David, because he expressed so vividly and dramatically our human nature, both the “better angles of our nature” and our flaws and weaknesses.

The first reading from Samuel illustrates for us how often we as human beings see and judge things that are counter-intuitive to how God sees them. The Lord instructs Samuel to go to Bethlehem where, when he meets Jesse and his sons, it will be revealed to him whom God has chosen to be king. Through very human eyes, Samuel assumes that Eliab is the chosen one. Yet, the Lord says to Samuel: “Do not judge from his appearance or from his lofty stature, because I have rejected him. Not as man sees does God see, because man sees the appearance, but the Lord looks into the heart.” This a riveting pronouncement to Samuel, for how else are we to make a judgment except for what we can see, visually, in front of us? Indeed, as we have come to see throughout human history, God confounds us because His ways indeed are not our ways. The challenge for us is to dig a little deeper, to take the risk in not judging simply by appearance, and so to appreciate in others and in everyday experiences God’s presence and handiwork in them.

Samuel asked Jesse if all of his sons were present when they met. Jesse informed him that there was the youngest son out tending the sheep. “Jesse sent and had the young man brought to them. He was ruddy, a youth handsome to behold and making a splendid appearance. The Lord said, “There—anoint him, for this is the one!” The moral of the story for us is to not always make assumptions about people and circumstances. God has and will continue to surprise us! This was certainly the case with David. David Wolpe writes, “*After God’s own heart*: David in character is like God in action. The inexplicable amalgam of good and evil is filtered through human hearts that embrace the totality of God’s world, not timid like Saul but daring, volatile, dangerous, and epic like David. Isaiah says that God ‘makes peace and creates evil.’ (Is. 45:7). In other words, all things have their source in God. David stands like Lear on the heath, an epitome of earthly experience, raging, beset, the one who feels more deeply, the one who has God’s heart. Perhaps David is the forerunner of the Messiah because this is the man who enacts what God wishes—in his sinfulness and sublimity, he is the most human of us all.”

The responsorial psalm this Sunday is fitting both as David himself was a shepherd called to be a king and the current medical and health crisis we are facing as a global community. People often refer to Psalm 23 in times of distress, loss, and uncertainty. The psalmist reassures us that the shepherd will take care of his flock. “The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want. Even though I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil; for you are at my side with your rod and your staff that give me courage. Only goodness and kindness follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for years to come.”

When I was growing up, Father Vital Vodusek, the longtime pastor of the Slovene-Croatian Church of the Nativity in San Francisco, had a great devotion to Jesus as the Good Shepherd. As many of you know, I have adopted this devotion myself. Jesus as the Good Shepherd watches over and protects always, even in times of danger and hardship. Yes, we recognize the reality of disappointment and hardship, but we remember even more that **GOD IS ALWAYS PRESENT TO US!** I pray that the tender image and reality of Jesus the Good Shepherd keeping us safe from harm brings us consolation and hope during this time especially. May we experience in spirit and in truth the words of St. Paul to the Ephesians: “You were once darkness, but now you are lights in the Lord. Live as children of light, for light produces every kind of goodness and righteousness and truth.”

In the Gospel of John, we hear proclaimed the story of Jesus curing the man born blind. This is a complicated story with many parts and themes. First, the disciples asked if the man himself or his parents were sinners, as it was believed at that time that anyone born with a physical or mental malady was condemned by God. Jesus assures them that the man’s blindness was a sign that would reveal God’s glory through the work of his Son. Jesus did this through healing. Then we have the Pharisees rebuking Jesus as a sinner for violating the Sabbath. An argument ensued and “there was division among them.” The Jews desperately wanted answers to their questions as to how this man born blind, and confirmed by his own parents, could be healed. In the midst of all of this commotion, the man born blind but now healed says (perhaps in a profession of faith): “This is what is so amazing, that you do not know where he is from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if one is devout and does his will, he listens to him”

We have echoes of the encounter of the Samaritan Woman at Jacob’s Well and the man once blind with Jesus. Both the woman and the cured man ask, “Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?” Jesus reveals to them that he is the Messiah, the one speaking with them. Jesus reveals himself as water and light. These images are especially powerful for us these days as we experience our spiritual journey and pilgrimage amidst challenges many of us have never faced. May we continue to recognize that Jesus is our constant companion who nourishes us and quenches our thirst with life-giving water and shows us the way by lighting our way!

May we continue to pray for one another, support and encourage one another, and remember we are united as one TEAM of the St. Pius family!

Father Tom