

Homily: 4th Sunday of Lent

Some of you may remember a comedian by the name of Rodney Dangerfield. He was a rather disheveled, heavy set man (shrug shoulders, tug his tie etc.) who always ended his story or joke with 4 words: “*I get no respect*”.

In fact, one of the self-effacing stories he told was how as a child he got lost at a state fair. Feeling desperate, he went up to a policeman and asked for help in finding his parents. After searching for awhile Rodney asked the policeman “Do you think we will ever find my parents?” The officer replies, “I don’t know, kid, there are so many places they could hide from you...*I get no respect!*”

Today’s readings teach us about respect. Not respect in the way we usually think of the word --- not in the sense of the respect we give to someone in authority. I am using the word respect in an alternative --- more basic way.

RESPECT comes from the Latin word respicere which means “*to look back at*”... or ... “*to look at a second time*” or “*to look more closely --- more deeply*”. That is the kind of respect God reveals in the readings and it is the kind of respect we secretly long for as a holy people of God.

We see in the 1st reading from Samuel, a wonderful example of God’s respect. In this story, Jesse presents to Samuel each of his seven sons only to discover that it was his youngest son, David, who was to be anointed king of Israel. The prophet Samuel says it so clearly: “*Not as man sees does God see, because man sees the appearance but the Lord looks into the heart.*”

Unfortunately in this day and age, Bible stories do not always grab our attention --- they may seem distant and irrelevant to our lives. That’s why sometimes God even uses modern day events --- like the comic pages --- to teach us how to see. (Sometimes I find some simple theology in those comics).

The comic strip “**Family Circus**” recently showed the little boy, Jeff, looking out a window and exclaiming excitedly, “*Look at all the birds, all the flowers and things out there!*” Then his older sister, Dolly, comes to the window and says, “*Look at all the dust, smudges and finger prints on this window!*” As Jeff walks away he says to Dolly, “*Don’t you know that windows are for looking through --- not at.*”

We all want to have that kind of vision. We want to get beyond our prejudices --- our biases --- our fears --- to see people, all of creation, as God does. This is part of our constant longing to be a holy people.

But how do we do it?

The answer lies in the long story of the man healed of his blindness in today’s Gospel. The story teaches us that it is only by coming to faith in Jesus Christ that our vision can be fully restored.

This is a story intended specifically for those preparing to receive Confirmation or RCIA. The depiction of this story appears seven times in the catacombs at Rome and they are always shown with the Sacraments of Initiation --- Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Eucharist. The man is sent to wash in the waters of Siloam --- reminding us of our own baptism. And the story is about enlightenment, fulfillment, and strength we receive in through the gifts of the Holy Spirit at Confirmation. It is about seeing more clearly --- it is about *respect*.

To the Pharisees, the man in today’s gospel was a true Rodney Dangerfield. He gets no respect. He is seen as a sinner --- an impostor --- a fool.

Who respects this man? Jesus does.

Jesus looks on him with the loving gaze of God and not only heals him of his physical blindness --- but brings him to faith in Christ.

- Notice that when first asked who heals him the man replies, “*The man called Jesus*”.
- Later when asked again, he says of Jesus, “*He is a prophet*”.
- Still later he acknowledges Jesus as “*The Son of Man*”.
- And finally he simply says “*I do believe, Lord*”. And he worships him.

This is a synopsis of our growth in faith --- a growth that takes a lifetime.

How do we come to see God?

By drawing closer to Christ in faith...

- It starts with *our* Baptism but it is a lifelong process of giving our hearts to Christ. An intellectual knowledge of the historical Jesus is not enough.
- Acknowledging Jesus as a prophet --- as the greatest man who ever lived is not enough.
- It is only when we are able to say that “Jesus is Lord” and mean it, that we make the break-through into seeing as God does.

Then we get true respect.