

WELCOME to those of you who are tuned in to this, our first attempt, at a broadcast Mass. Thank you for being with us in this virtual world. I miss you. I miss celebrating mass with you. We all miss having you here in the church and on campus. If this feels a bit weird to you, it feels REALLY weird to me! I've never preached to an empty church before. There are just enough of us here to be able to offer this to you. I'm grateful to them all for their dedication in trying to serve you at this moment.

I also realized, with some horror, as I began to work on this homily, that you now have a power over me that you never had before. YOU CAN TURN ME OFF! BUT ALL THE GOOD PEOPLE WHO LOVE JESUS WILL PUT UP WITH ME! But we are trying to make this a helpful moment of prayer, hope, and consolation in this difficult time.

I DO have a joke. I thought we especially needed one right now. A man was flying from Seattle to San Francisco. The plane made a stop in Sacramento, and many of the passengers got off to stretch their legs. Everybody got off the plane except one gentleman who was blind. His seeing-eye dog lay quietly underneath the seats in front of him. The man was obviously a regular on the flight because the pilot addressed him by name. "Keith, we're in Sacramento for almost an hour. Would you like to get off and stretch your legs?" "No thanks, but maybe my dog would."

So now picture it – and picture the reaction of the passengers. The pilot was wearing sunglasses. He came off the airplane, through the boarding lounge, led by a seeing-eye dog. Best of all was a lady in the boarding lounge who said: "Wow – they really make those planes to fly by themselves these days!"

And yes, you get three points – but you can turn me off whenever you get tired! And while I can't see that, just remember that GOD is watching! First, the gospel and some background. Jesus is in Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles, an autumn festival when people built little tabernacles – booths or tents – to recall their tent dwellings in the years they wandered in the wilderness prior to their arrival in the promised land. The days and nights of this festival were filled with singing, dancing and ceremonies during which priests carried water from the pool of Siloam to the temple. Tabernacles was also a feast of lights. Four great menorahs were erected in the temple so that, as the Jewish Mishna records, "There was not a courtyard in Jerusalem that did not reflect this light." Easy to see the connection to Jesus as the light of the world, another of Jesus' titles in John's gospel.

The motif of washing -leading -to -sight anticipates baptism at the Easter Vigil for our elect, who celebrate the Second Scrutiny on this Sunday. This rite is part of the process of purification to prepare the Elect for that water bath. The story of the blind man also reminds us all that this journey into Christ involves persecution. Once the blind man receives his sight, he is confronted by a world that does not know Jesus. Yet as he is berated and questioned by Jewish officials, his insight into the person of Jesus grows. His descriptions move from 'the man Jesus,' to 'prophet,' to 'worshiper of God' and finally to a confession of Jesus as 'The Son of Man.' Like 2 elevators passing, the blind man's accusers descend into spiritual blindness as he moves up toward the true light of Christ. The narrative does not simply contrast the blind with those who see. The blind man's faithfulness under attack offers John's persecuted community a model of courageous witness. It's a good lesson for us with the coronavirus. We too are called to remain faithful in the midst of this struggle.

There is a lot of rich symbolism as well. Jesus mixes saliva and clay. Irenaeus of Lyons wrote that Jesus "was making clear that this was the same hand of God through which man was formed from clay." Clay

*"This is not claimed as original material; it is the fruit of years of reading and research, collated by volunteers, but not always correctly footnoted, or not footnoted at all. It was created solely for the purpose of an oral proclamation in the context of the liturgy of the church. Every effort has been made to provide the necessary attribution to the authors of the sources."*

should ring a biblical bell for us. Think Adam & Eve. Remember, John's gospel begins with the phrase from the opening of the Book of Genesis: "In the beginning..." A new creation is being made in this blind man, just as in the beginning there was the first creation work of God. Again, almost everything in John's gospel is more than what it initially appears. The baptismal symbolism screams out when we are told that Siloam means 'sent.' Jesus is the One Sent. All of us who are baptized are sent. (Adapted from John Donoghue, in AMERICA, Feb 4, 2008, p. 21)

Second, this story of a man coming to sight is a great symbol of our own coming to insight. Insight is the deeper seeing that following Christ entails. It means seeing into the meaning of things, the deeper reality that underlies it all. It is the God perspective that so often eludes us in our busy lives. But insight is there for those who wish to claim it.

Without insight we are perpetually the emperor with no clothes. Without insight we end up living empty lives that are mostly just self-serving. Insight is what we get when we look inside and get a glimpse, a clue of what is really going on. It can sometimes surprise us by what we find within our own hearts – the goodness as well as the evil. Insight leads to our best self and being the person that we know deep down we are called to be.

So how do we get this deeper insight? Lots of ways. Prayer is an important part of this. And I don't mean anything monkish. Just 10 minutes each day – a simple "Help me to see your way or path in this, Lord," would do. Or, "Open my eyes to see this as YOU see it, O God."

It also means taking enough time to pay attention, to recall at the end of the day what's happened to us. What made us happy, sad, mad, overwhelmed, confused, surprised? Whatever moves us bears divine insight. These deep experiences, that happen to us on an almost daily basis, are like a cosmic little tap or poke from God – sometimes playful, sometimes like a punch in the gut, sometimes like a still, small voice – but it's the voice of God, nonetheless.

There's a lot of divine insight to be found in the ordinary manner of our days. Divine insight reminds us that if one bush can light up – any bush can catch fire anywhere, anytime. Every place we stand is holy ground, including our kitchen, our cubicle, our computer as we learn online or work from home, rocking a baby to sleep, being huddled together as a family watching this Mass. I'm sure there is a TON of divine insight in this virus – just waiting to be gleaned as we navigate something none of us have probably ever experienced before. We just need to pay attention. Prayerful attention. We need to stop long enough to ponder. Take stock. WONDER. Any people, events, and choices that bring out the best or the worst in us, the good twin or the evil twin are potential insight givers. Our gut feelings will let us know how well we're doing and will nag us until we get the message – the clue we need to 'see more clearly, love more dearly, follow more nearly.'

For those who have the eyes to see, insight always comes from the best and worst parts of any given day. God has just as much to say when good things happen to us as He does when bad things happen to us. Good news and bad news both bear divine insight. That's the meaning of the Paschal Mystery. Dying and rising. It's all of one piece, and it is all packed full with the presence of God. Coronavirus and all!

Shortly before I left for the seminary, at my high school graduation, I was given a holy card from a nun that said, "God writes straight with crooked lines." At first, I wondered if she was trying to tell me that my going to seminary was one of God's crooked lines. But she was always so encouraging to me! But we are all God's crooked lines. By the grace of God all the disappointments, failures, mistakes, even tragedies become

part of the winding path of our lives, given as turning points, and loaded with divine insight – should we care and have the openness to see.

The best and happiest times are no less insightful just because they feel so good. During the best times our primary job is to become grateful, humble, and generous. Then we can party hearty! Thank God that goodness is sometimes so tangible we can feel it. But the kind of thanks that our gratitude should provoke is what moves us to be kind, just, forgiving, and generous. We who are so blessed should in turn bless others. Our world is desperately in need of global sharing. If we're not in that picture, we need to get into it asap. Share share share.

What we do with what we get is always loaded with divine insight. It's also the stuff of which final judgments are made. And it's in everyone's best interest to pay undivided attention to every bit of it, especially those insights that lead us to discover what enough is. It's a pity so few in this world seem to know. Let's not be among them.

And in the end, the deepest insight is all about love, my third point. Jesus made love the heart of His teaching – love of God and love of neighbor. How could something so simple be so much missed in our world? Because there is so much blindness! Maybe this virus will help us to re-align ourselves with love – with service – with generosity – with Christ. We all love to fall in love – it's exciting to realize that there is someone out there who believes she or he couldn't possibly be happy without us. To make such a difference to someone is to give our lives meaning. Isn't fame really just this on a much larger scale? -- to believe the world could not possibly survive without our presence? And being happy? It is ultimately the byproduct of meaning in our lives. Without a sense that we make a difference, I doubt if any of would be happy.

So be about love. That's the deepest insight, the one that removes all of our blindness. Take time each day for a few moments with God – working from home, being out of school certainly gives us much more opportunity! Let's not waste it endlessly checking updates on the number of new cases in what counties and countries.

We could just tell God that we love Him and are grateful that He loves us. That would be a great prayer! And tell God THANKS! You know, God might like a word of thanks for all of the things He gives us every single day. After a sunset, we could just say, "Nice job, God – that was a real beauty again today."

And then tell the people around you that you love them. Now that whole families are actually at home for an entire day – we probably are getting on one another's nerves. Maybe it's NOT happening in your family, but you may have heard rumors about it happening in OTHER PEOPLE'S families! So tell your family members that you love them. Spouse, children, parents, friends. It's not mushy. It's real. It's true. And it's deep. And it leads to God. If you read any of the transcripts of the final calls from the burning Twin Towers on 9-11, they were all about the same thing – calling everyone they knew to tell them goodbye and that they loved them. They didn't ask about their portfolios, they didn't say how's the new kitchen coming along? They told people that they loved them.

So be about love. Simply love. And we will see as that blind man once saw, as clearly as the angels, as clearly as God Himself. Amen. (these last 2 sections freely adapted from Karol Jackowski, TEN FUN THINGS TO DO BEFORE YOU DIE, p. 16-23)