

Lent 4.

1. Patricia Sanchez, who writes each week for the commentary called Celebration, tells us the following story taken from an article in the New York Times Magazine in 1991. A hundred women from Cambodia, now resettled in Long Beach, CA, were certifiably blind even though there was nothing physically wrong with their eyes. They should have been able to see, but they couldn't. Why couldn't they see? Sanchez writes: "Theirs was a psychosomatic blindness induced by the horrors they had seen. The injuries they suffered had not been to their bodies but to their minds, and to compensate for having been so traumatized, their eyes simply refused to see anything at all." They had witnessed the killing fields in their native Cambodia under the Pol Pot regime.

2. Do you believe that? It is hard to believe, is it not? What it tells us is that our minds, our psyches, have a tremendous influence on our bodies. We are really one reality, body and soul, and the two influence each other and work together.

3. Our long and beautiful Gospel for this 4th Sunday of Lent is about seeing. It tells the story of a blind man coming to see both

physically and spiritually. When his neighbors ask him how he came to see, he tells them: “The man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and told me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ So I went there and washed and was able to see.” Then, later in the story when the Pharisees ask him what he thinks about the man who opened his eyes, he says: “he is a prophet.” When the Pharisees now tell him that Jesus is a sinner because he cured on the Sabbath, the man answers them: “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. It is unheard of that anyone ever opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he would not be able to do anything.” The Pharisees then expel him from the synagogue. But Jesus finds him and asks him if he believes in the Son of Man. “Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him,” the man responds. And Jesus says to him: “You have seen him, and the one speaking to you is he.” And the man then answers: “I do believe, Lord,” and he worships him,” And so the healed man’s progression has been from seeing Jesus as a man, to seeing him as a prophet, to believing in him as the Son of Man and worshipping him.

4. The Pharisees, on the other hand, don’t really move much in their view of Jesus. They start off seeing Jesus as a sinner because

he has cured on the Sabbath, and they remain there because they refuse to see what his ability to cure the blind man is telling them about Jesus' relationship to God. Therefore they are the blind ones, and their blindness is self-imposed. It is somewhat like the blindness of the Cambodian women. Their minds, their psyches, prevent them from seeing what is staring them in the face.

5. This story in John's Gospel takes place in the context of the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles, a feast of Light. Thus John is presenting Jesus here as the new and true Light of the World. And the Church chooses this passage to be the Gospel for this 4th Sunday of Lent because Lent is a preparation for the celebration of the Lord's resurrection and the receiving of new members into the church in baptism, as well as the renewal of baptismal vows for those already baptized. And baptism in the early church was called "the illumination," the enlightening of our souls. Indeed, as you know, the candidate for baptism is given a lighted candle to symbolize his new life, his new illumination, in Christ.

6. In Mt 7 and Luke 6 Jesus talks about not judging so that you will not be judged in turn, and he uses this image: "Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother,

‘Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,’ when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother’s eye.”

7. Therefore, as we continue our Lenten journey, let us ask the Lord for the grace to see the logs in our own eyes before we attempt to remove the specks from the eyes of our brothers and sisters.