

My dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

It was only a little over a month ago that many of us were left in the dark when an ice and wind storm caused power lines to be broken by fallen trees. Remember? Did that happen to any of you?

Do you remember what you were doing when the power went out and you were left in the dark?

What did it feel like? Were you afraid?

I remember I was sitting at my computer, writing, working on a sermon. My dog was laying on the floor beside me. At first the lights and the computer blinked, and then they blinked again. Then, there was total darkness.

It was a little disconcerting. I wasn't scared at first. It was around 11:00 o'clock at night. And I realized that I didn't have anything near-by to light my way to my bedroom. I started getting nervous. Then, I became afraid. I might trip over the dog. Or I might fall going up the steps. It was pitch black. But, eventually I made my way to my bed and crawled in. My little brown dog was wise. He stayed behind me and followed me. Maybe he was afraid I would fall on him too.

But, once I got in bed, I started thinking how terrible it must be to be in the dark all the time. How difficult it must be to be blind!

Certainly, that was the plight of the man in today's Gospel story. Jesus' disciples made the terrible mistake of thinking that the man or his parents or someone did something wrong to have caused his blindness.

That's a mistake that a lot of people make, even today. It's kind of human nature. When we come upon a person with a severe disability, it disturbs us. Mostly we feel a deep sense of compassion for them, and instinctively wonder why they must suffer in this way.

It always raises the question, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" Or even more generally, "Why is there suffering at all?" Then, we start questioning God. "Where is God to be found in the suffering of the people who died in the mudslide out in Washington State or the suffering of the people on the doomed Malaysian airliner or the families who mourn their loss?" And when there are no easy answers to these questions, it causes many people to stumble in their faith in God.

In the case of this blind man, Jesus makes it abundantly clear that his disability, his blindness "is so that the works of God might be made visible through him." And I believe that is the case in so much human suffering. In ways we never suspect, sometimes in ways in which we are not even aware, the works of God are made visible through that suffering.

For instance, looking at the suffering of those who suffered terrible loss in the mudslide in Washington State, emergency service personnel work shoulder to shoulder with construction workers from all over the country at first trying to find survivors, and now the bodies of the dead to bring closure and comfort to the suffering families, while boy scouts and other volunteers, old and young, from near and far, provide meals for those who are working around the clock. Is that not the work of God made visible?

Nations that are barely on speaking terms with each other, China, India, Japan, Malaysia, the United States, and European nations have all sent their navy and air force personnel to work together to find a missing airliner to bring comfort to the grieving families of the passengers. Is that not the work of God made visible?

Jesus, in the healing of this blind man, emphatically demonstrates that God doesn't want anyone to suffer, neither saint nor sinner. He says, "I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see might see, and those who do see might become blind." He's telling us that God brings good out of all evil, but we need the eyes of faith to see it. And sometimes it takes awhile for those eyes to open.

Notice the gradual healing of the blind man. When first questioned, he tells his neighbors that "the man called Jesus" healed him. Then, questioned by the Pharisees, he proclaims, "He is a Prophet." Finally, questioned by Jesus Himself who asks him, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?", then Jesus reveals that it is He, the no-longer-blind-man replies, "I do believe, Lord", and he worshiped Him.

First came the healing of the body, then the healing of the mind, and, finally, the spiritual healing that enlightened his soul, that led to his beautiful profession of faith.

As we make our profession of faith today, my dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ, may we be mindful of how the works of God are being made visible through us, even in our suffering, for as St. Paul tells us today we "are light in the Lord."