

Dear Friends,

We are in the middle of Lent. The fourth Sunday is called Laetare Sunday, which means Rejoicing. As we have been reflecting about the first readings during Lent, today's first reading brings the message that God looks at the heart, not the appearance.

The book of Samuel gives the idea of a different style of leadership. There was a transition for two reasons. The Judges were spokespersons for God for the people of Israel. There were some prophets who emerged in the community during that time. Samuel was the last one in the list of prophets who lead the community. People wanted kings for two reasons. One, Samuel was getting old, and they felt that he could not judge them. Secondly, they felt insecure with other nations in the neighborhood who all had kings. We read in the book of 1 Samuel 8: 6-9 How God asks Samuel to grant the people's request. God strongly felt people's rejection of him and worshipping strange Gods.

I would like to focus on two things for our reflections:

1) God desires Good for all of us how ever we are. God is good all the time. Lot of times we feel that God abandons us and allows bad things to happen in our lives. God desires to do good even when we are away from him. We can reflect it from the lives of Israel. Just recap the story: Jacob is named Israel. He had lived in Cannon. Jacob's sons hated Joseph, and Joseph was sold to Egypt. He was given a big position in Pharoah's kingdom. Then famine came in the land of Cannon. Jacob's brothers went to collect food. They settled there for a few hundred years. After the death of Joseph, they became slaves and God saw their pain and suffering in Egypt; and called Moses to bring the people back to land of Cannon from Egypt. They deserted God so many times and worshiped strange Gods so many times. Still God wants to make the covenant with them. God desires Good for people. Today God desires to do good for us. He sent his only Son to us who gave his life for us. Let us open our eyes to see the goodness God has for us.

2) God never judges or looks by appearances, rather he looks at our heart. Today's first reading gives the perfect example of how God looks at us. Saul was anointed as first king. God was unhappy about his performances with the people of Israel. He disobeyed God's word. He told Samuel to anoint another king. He went and saw all the sons of Jesse. When Jesse produces David, immediately Samuel heard the voice to anoint him. He was the youngest of all seven of his sons. God selected David. Was David good? We know the story. He was an adulterer and a murderer. God looks at your heart.

Samuel rejected Jesse's oldest son because "Not as man sees does God see, because man sees the appearance, but the Lord looks into the heart." With this single statement, the Word of God unmask much of the world's blindness.

We look at poor people and see nothing other than rundown houses and littered streets. We look at the homeless and see nothing other than dirty faces and ragged clothes. We look at people who are different from us, and we see nothing other than the color of their skin, or the way they manipulate their bodily limbs.

God loves you and me not by our color, appearance, or some other criteria. He loves us because we are his sons and daughters. He simply loves everyone for the same matter. What about you and me? Do we love everyone? How do we look at people in our lives?