

Fourth Sunday of Lent  
March 26 & 27, 2017

Sr. Kathy Osbelt  
All Saints Parish, Syr. NY

What comes out when you squeeze an orange? You get orange juice, of course. Not apple or grape juice. Orange juice because that is what is inside oranges. It's the essence of oranges.

What comes out of you when someone puts the squeeze on you? When someone is mean to you, betrays you, disappoints you or gossips about you. What comes out of you when someone treats you badly, or when you are under stress, or there is a failure in your plans? Is it anger that oozes out of you? Sadness? Depression? Fear? Revenge? Violence?

Just this past Tuesday there were four cars of Francis House Staff people traveling down 690 West coming from a day-long retreat at Alverna Heights near Green Lakes. As I came toward the city I saw a bumper to bumper situation so I got off at Thompson Road. Twenty minutes later I received the call that one of our staff person's car was hit on three different corners of the car because of two men acting out road rage which caused a five car pileup in which three innocent people had their cars bashed. Thank You, God, that no one was critically injured... but could have been. It's obvious what is coming from the men who caused the accident.

What comes forth when Jesus is squeezed? Throughout the Gospels we see strength, truth, compassion, forgiveness and nonviolence. He is the light bringer and out of him flows that which comes from the light.

In today's Gospel he heals a man born blind. Jesus gives light to his eyes, but also light to his soul. Upon close examination we notice all the players who are in darkness. First of all, the disciples asked if the man or his parents sinned to cause the blindness. Jesus explained that it was not sin that caused the blindness. First century people thought all malady was caused by blindness. But this blind man will show the visible power of God at work. In the end, the blind man comes to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, for the light has not only touched his body but his soul as well.

In the meantime, there were the neighbors who questioned whether or not this really was the man born blind or someone who looked like him. Then they were incredulous when the man declared he was the blind man. The neighbors remain

in darkness as they bring him to the Pharisees. The once blind man tells how he was made to see and the Pharisees then declared Jesus a sinner for healing on the Sabbath. The blind man says: "Look, I don't know if this Jesus is a sinner or not. What I know is that I could not see but now I do." He exits the synagogue. The parents are rounded up and while they testify that yes that was their son, they would not say anything about Jesus because they were in fear of the Pharisees. The darkness is spreading: neighbors, Pharisees, parents. The blind man is brought back in. Questioned again and thrown out of the synagogue because he declares Jesus as being from God.

So many characters in this Gospel text have blinders on. Blinders on race horses make them focus only on the track, they see nothing else. Blinders on people's minds refuse to let anyone or anything challenge their opinions. They rationalize everything. There is only one perspective, and it's theirs.

Recently the President of our Leadership Conference of Women Religious received a letter which sat on her desk unopened because it was from a man who had left four irate voice mail messages because he was in favor of the current administration's travel ban and he was upset that the dental clinic provided through the local Catholic Charities treated Bangladeshis, Indians, and Pakistanis. His take was that it should treat only uninsured Americans. Now of course, up until a new bill passes, every American was covered by the Affordable Care Act. This man felt that "progressive" sisters who support refugees and immigrants were naïve. We should stick to schools and stay out of politics. I have heard this too as I am sure most religious and people who give voice to just have. But there is some truth to the statement that we are naïve. Not about supporting our sisters and brothers, but about thinking it's a progressive or conservative agenda, Democrat or Republican position. In the dark still a bit because the Gospel of Jesus Christ is neither liberal nor conservative, progressive nor regressive. To be in the light you and I must take personal responsibility to act, not out of party loyalties, but out of Gospel commitment. We try our best to influence change that brings life because we all, ALL, belong to the one Body of Christ.

Another way of saying that is that we are called to throw any person in need a line. In her book: Now I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, Maya Angelou's biography, she said of one kind woman: "She was the first one to throw me a line." Jesus threw the blind man a line, He wanted to throw the Pharisees a line

too but they held too tightly onto their idea of who was right, who was in the light.

We may have been trying very hard in these past weeks to hold onto a sacrifice we decided to take up for Lent, or to do something special, or make time for prayer. But none of that matters to God unless what we are doing helps us to see, helps us to catch the life-line, helps us to throw a life-line to others. In the end, what matters is that our eyes are opened and we begin to see as God sees.

Finally, let us hear again the words from Paul's letter read today: "You were once in darkness, now you are in the light. Light produces every kind of goodness." Soooo, what comes out of you when you are squeezed?