

There are appearances and then there are appearances

[During the last three weeks of Lent prior to Palm Sunday the Church provides alternative readings from John's Gospel to each Cycle's standard readings – as beneficial to any candidates scheduled for reception into the Church at Easter time. The readings however warrant the attention of anyone and so I have focused on them on these three Sundays.]

Over the years Jane and I have enjoyed reruns of the British sitcom *Keeping Up Appearances*. The series highlights a lower middle class social climber named Hyacinth Bucket (pronounced Bouquet). We catch an idea of where she came from by visits to her sister's house – located in a run down neighborhood, broken gate, indoor space dominated by a stout, beer drinking brother-in-law. Hyacinth lives in suburbia nervously creating the appearance of good taste and aristocratic manners, yet always (as we used to say) “showing her slip” – revealing she isn't what she appears to be.

In today's first reading the prophet Samuel is assigned by the Lord to find a successor to King Saul – some “heir apparent” out of the seven sons of Jesse. The eldest son Eliab seems the right choice – given his appearance: *his lofty stature*. But the Lord restrains Samuel: *Do not judge from his appearance . . . his lofty stature . . . Not as man sees does God see, because man sees from appearance, . . . the Lord looks into the heart*. So “appearance” here means façade, a surface appearance that conceals rather than reveals the limitations of the candidate. When Samuel finally sees Jesse's youngest son David who makes *a splendid appearance* in the sense of *this is the real thing*, he anoints David. He discerns qualities that will create a new age for Israel.

In today's Gospel we read of a man who was blind from birth. As human beings you could say we are all born blind – in so far as – while we see biologically – we don't see a lot of things, we don't see in the sense that we understand who and why and where we really are. We are educated to make our way through life in practical ways – even in factual ways, but not in ways that make us say: Aha! so that's the why and destiny of it all! We live among “appearances”, myopically.

Until the Jesus of today's Gospel comes along – and something sensational happens to you. Things begin to appear progressively in all their deeper reality and significance. Life opens up, goes multidimensional, leaving you possibly an enigma to the collective status quo. “Isn't this the one who used to sit and beg?” Some say, “It is,” but others say, “It only *appears* to be him . . . This isn't the Joe or Sally I once recognized.” But, if you let the tradition you follow really sink in, you will somehow begin to look real, be the more radiant self you were created to be, you will finally *appear*, come out into the open - as an appearance as visionaries experience apparitions - as an authentic human being.

As St. Paul says: You were once darkness (you wore shades), but now you are light in the Lord – so Awake, O Sleeper, and get out of bed – and wake up the world wherever you appear.

Geoff Wood