

4 Lent A

March 1, 2008

Cathedral

5:00 and 10:00

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It's probably an ancient baptismal hymn that the New Testament Letter to the Ephesians slips into today's reading:

**“Arise, O sleeper, and arise from the dead,  
and Christ will give you light!”**

...and Christ will give you light!

After we have heard today's Gospel, it's a question worth pondering: *When have I come to see differently after asking Jesus to open my eyes?*

Yes, it's the month of March Madness, and we're already debating what seed our team will get. Last week also marked the start of baseball spring training, and despite the doping scandal that's shaken the game, I'm already checking the line scores of the exhibition games. In baseball's annals last month also noted a milestone—the centenary of one of the games most colorful figures. On February 17, 1908, Walter Lanier Barber was born in Columbus, Mississippi. Actually he never played baseball, but Red Barber became the voice of baseball over the radio, and in 1978 (with Mel Allen) became the first broadcaster voted into baseball's Hall of Fame.

“They're tearing up the pea patch,” Red Barber would tell his radio audience in Brooklyn. Unlike in his native Mississippi, there was probably not a single pea patch in metropolitan New York, but listeners got the point that the Dodgers were on a roll.

And in the 1947 World Series game when Cookie Lavagetto ruined Bill Bevens's no-hitter and won the game with two outs in the ninth inning, Red Barber cried out in disbelief, “Well, I'll be a suck-egg mule.” Probably not a single listener knew what a “suck-egg mule” was, but people loved to listen to Red Barber.

I didn't start hearing him until after his retirement. For many years, every Friday morning on NPR's “Morning Edition,” Red Barber would be

interviewed about sports happenings by Bob Edwards (whom Red called “Colonel” because he was from Kentucky).

That year of 1947 changed Red Barber. When Branch Rickey had confided to his radio announcer that he would soon sign on the first African-American player in the major leagues, Jackie Robinson, this son of the South Red Barber thought about resigning in protest. His wife, whom he called Miss Lylah, advised him to have a martini and sleep on it. The next morning Red recalled a passage in the Bible that persuaded him turn the page of history.

Years later Red Barber wrote, “I know that if I have achieved any understanding and tolerance in my life, I thank Jackie Robinson. He did far more for me than I did for him.” (1)

Red Barber saw life differently, and he changed. Scripture and the bold witness of someone else triggered him to *see* differently. Sisters and brothers: As we pray over the Scriptures, can we honestly admit that we see Jesus more clearly now than in a former Lent?

The blind man washed in the Pool of Siloam, and his eyes were opened. In the alcove is kept the Book of the Elect, in which are the signatures of all those who will be baptized at the great Easter Vigil throughout our diocese. Another ancient name for baptism is “**enlightenment**,” because coming out of the blessed waters we are to see differently—because of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Have we ever really come to *see* something in our lives differently after asking Jesus to open our eyes? Do we look at the poor pretty much like the rest of folks do? Do we evaluate war, or direct abortion, or immigration within our border—well, just like most folks do? Do we live pretty much the same sexual ethic as the rest of folks?

Finally, because we have been truly consecrated in our baptism, do we see ourselves as holy and beloved in God’s *sight*—made so by grace?

It’s Laetare Sunday—the midway point in this Lent. Like the man in the Gospel, let’s truly rely on Jesus to change us that we might see—truly *see*—as he would have us!

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(1) These reflections on Red Barber came from George Vecsey in “Voices from the Past Are Echoing Today,” in The New York Times (January 13, 2008), pg. 5 in “Sports” section.