Mature Leadership is Guided by Faith

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In ancient times, as people organized into societies, the communities laid precise obligations upon their members. Almost without exception, the family and the clan provided the structures that permeated the maturing and passing of each generation. Among the Hebrews the first-born son had the duty of caring for the mother and unmarried sisters after the patriarch's death. This led people to expect that the first-born was the best candidate for other positions of leadership. However, very often when Israel faced a crisis, the leader chosen by God would cause surprise. There are undoubtedly many reasons for this divine pedagogy; among them is the principle that God's thoughts cannot be limited to the perspective of human reason (see Is 55:8-9). Knowing the limitations of their leader, people would more likely place their faith in God rather than in human might or intelligence.

Thus, when Samuel, the great prophet and judge who had given Israel its first King, realized that Saul was a failure in God's eyes he anointed a successor. Even he was surprised when God passed over seven mature sons of Jesse, selecting a youth who had not even been invited to the sacrificial banquet! Beloved of God, David was endowed with "the Spirit of the Lord", guiding him throughout his long reign. Flawed as we all are, and guilty of grave sin, David grew in faith and a life of prayer, as shown in the psalms and laments attributed to him.

The Fourth Gospel presents a rich doctrine of faith, intimately linked with Baptism and the gift of a fuller life for the believer. Jesus taught Nicodemus that the new life comes from above, bestowed by the Spirit (Jn 3:1-15). Faith is an insight into all reality now perceived in its essential relationship with God and his plan. The new life has "faculties" that enhance the potential of our natural gifts.

In John's drama of Jesus' healing of the man born blind, the Master opens a man's eyes by washing them and this becomes a sign of the gift required by all human beings. Human logic and wisdom can be wonderful, but ultimately provide only a fragmentary vision of reality. Yet how sure some of us are that we have all the answers, that we are masters of our present and future life!

By virtue of their authority, Jewish leaders had the responsibility to supervise teaching and other activities that would affect people's faith and moral life. Undoubtedly many were sincere in their desire to understand God's will and how to teach the divine message to their contemporaries. As in other times and places, there may have been among them charlatans and some who became inebriated with the exercise of power. The Jewish authorities are often portrayed negatively in the Gospels, with their failure to appreciate Jesus and his work growing to a crescendo of condemnation. It is beyond the scope of this reflection to deal with this confrontation adequately.
It suffices to note that the proclamation of the Gospel is intended to alert us Christians that we can fail in faith, especially as adults and leaders in our community. Indeed, we must know our faith and teach it vigorously. But we too must be wary of corrupting faith by the politics of power. And we must humbly expect that our God may have a surprise or two in store for us!