

4th Sunday of Lent: Laetare Sunday
The Man Born Blind
John 9: 1-41

Who sinned here? When looking at the man born blind the disciples asked Jesus if the blind man sinned or his parents for there was an understanding that illness or misfortune was a punishment from God for the individual or his parents having sinned. But this speaks of a punishing God. Jesus responds that neither sinned in this case but “it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him.” Last Sunday and Monday while running on the boardwalk, I noticed a blind man walking with his cane. I said nothing on Sunday, but his presence made an impression on me. I thought of his courage and his strength to surmount obstacles. I pondered what it must be like not to be able to see. On Monday, I decided to say hello and he warmly responded. In a day, I moved from seeing a blind man to seeing another human being with equal dignity whom I should greet. Yesterday, I read a small article from the website *Aleteia* of a mother who wrote about doctors speaking very apologetically when breaking the news to her that one of her twins would be born with Downs Syndrome. She commented that “You’re made to feel that their life is valued less.” She knows all life is “inherently valuable independent of whether or not they [are] normal.” Near the end of the article the mother includes a note saying, “I may have given you life, but you have helped me find mine.” This mother sees well. Jesus responded to the disciples about the blind man’s condition “it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him.” All people, without condition, make visible the works of God. We just have to be able to see this. To do this well, we need to allow Christ to come into our lives.

Jesus takes the initiative. The blind man never asked to be cured. He was used to his condition. It’s all he ever knew. He grew accustomed to it. But today in this Gospel, he takes the risk for something new. Jesus takes the initiative to give him sight and with such simple means, dirt and spit. Likewise, Christ takes the initiative to come into our lives to help us see, to remove our blind spots, our prejudices, fears, doubts, anger, hurt and pain. He does it with simple means of mercy and compassion often through others in our lives. This can lead us to a greater faith. Later in the Gospel, Jesus offers the newly sighted man this faith which he readily accepts as he was already well on his way by proclaiming who Jesus was to the spiritually blind (his neighbors, the Pharisees and the Jews in

general). In his dialogue with them in their unbelief, he claims Jesus to be a prophet as did the Samaritan woman last week in her first encounter with Jesus. They saw clearly who Jesus is. Though the resistance to believe is strong, the newly sighted man continues to explain the healing over and over again till he proclaims "I told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear again?" Resistance. And then he hits them with the question, "Do you want to be his disciples too?" The man attests to his newfound discipleship but the Pharisees resist provoking their interlocutor to proclaim, "This is what is so amazing, that you do not know where he is from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if one is devout and does his will, he listens to him. It is unheard of that anyone ever opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he would not be able to do anything." **Game, set, match.** One sees while the others prefer to remain blind, foolishly blind. So obstinate are they to his preaching about Jesus and what sight he could bring to their lives, they have no other recourse than to throw him out. But "Jesus found him" to give him definitively and fully the gift of faith, to proclaim that he is the Son of Man (the Messiah). As the Samaritan woman leaves the well (without bucket but with "living water") to become a missionary disciple, we can assume that the newly sighted man becomes a missionary disciple while the rest hold on to what was, a life of sin, a life without a relationship to Christ. It was all they ever knew. They were comfortable, used to it and dared not risk the chance for something new, some new vision, some new freedom.

What about us? Will we accept the invitation, the initiative that Jesus offers us daily to see as God sees, as we heard proclaimed in the first reading in the selection of David as king? Do we want the sight, the faith, so that we may spend our day "so that the works of God might be made visible through us?" Or do we prefer to hold on to what has always been? Lent offers us a chance to risk for something new, something liberating, new vision, seeing as God sees, "walking by faith and not by sight" as the world sees.

Read the signs of the times. We must always see what Jesus daily offers us. Never in our lives is this more real than in this Coronavirus pandemic. May we see it as an opportunity to grow closer to God, to surrender to God, to place God as the center and source of our being. In this time of doubt and uncertainty, let us see as God sees. Let us proclaim God boldly most especially by the works we do today in the daylight. Make God visible to others who may have been blinded by their own pursuits. Let God in to remove our blindness, so we may see God's loving presence especially in our sisters and brothers.