

4th Sunday Lent A (John 9:1-41)

As a short story, today's Gospel is fast moving and holds our attention. The cast of characters is very real, and they are portrayed with great depth of human understanding. It's an engaging story and almost seems like a script for a Marx Brothers movie, with Groucho playing the man born blind.

First, the neighbors argue about whether he is the blind beggar that they are familiar with. And he says, "It's me!" "But it can't be," they say. "Yes, it's me!" "No, it can't be. Besides, all blind men look alike." Then the Pharisees ask, "Were you born blind?" "You bet your life I was!" "You can't be because you can see." "But I was born blind." "Impossible." So they ask his parents who try to avoid the question. "He was born blind, but we don't know whether he can see now." Then, back to the Pharisees who want to know who cured him. "Jesus cured me." He couldn't cure you because he's a sinner." "But he did." "He did not; anyhow how could you know- you're blind." So they kicked him out and denied the obvious. The blind man could see and those who presumed they could see were really the blind ones.

Let's take a look at the cast of characters in our Gospel story. The Pharisees cared little for the man born blind. He was merely an impersonal object to them and not a person of dignity. They weren't interested in whether he was healed, but only in how his healing would affect themselves and their constricted conception of how God works in the lives of people. Their minds were closed to new experiences of a compassionate loving God, and they were blinded by legalisms that blocked them from discovering the truth. Their hardness of heart blinded them to a knowledge of Jesus Christ who is truth and light for our lives.

Next, let us look at the parents of the man born blind. They were people ruled by fear, not open to God's perfect love which casts out fear. As people of fear, they were without joy in their hearts. They were closed to the possibility of their son's healing being a manifestation of God's power because they feared exclusion from the synagogue if they were to disagree with the Pharisees. Fear paralyzed them as fear always does, and so they took no risks, as people who live in fear never do. They feared the unknown consequences of recognizing Jesus as the Lord of their lives.

Finally, let's look at the man born blind. He didn't ask to be given sight, but when offered, he did as Jesus told him. And thus began his journey of faith. Trusting his experience of Jesus, he grows gradually in his knowledge and understanding of Jesus. From his initial recognition of the "the man they call Jesus," he begins to recognize Jesus as prophet. And from acknowledging him as prophet, he begins to reflect on his healing experience, and as he does so, he sees Jesus with increasing clarity as the messianic Son of Man, and finally, as Lord, and bowing down, he worships him.

As with the man born blind, when we are open to, and encounter the healing power of the Lord Jesus in our own lives, Pharisaic self-righteousness and narrow closed-mindedness are removed from us by the saving power of God. The perfect love of Jesus casts out all fear from our hearts, and we are then rendered free to allow ourselves to be loved by the God who chooses to love us passionately and without conditions. And with the man born blind, we too can proclaim on our own journey of faith, "I do believe, Lord." We give thanks that we are no longer blind, but see with the eyes of faith the depth of the compassionate love of the Lord Jesus who gives meaning to our lives and who feeds us with his very self in the Eucharist.

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