

Sunday of the Man Born Blind

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
CHRIST IS RISEN !!

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made. In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. The light shines in darkness; and the darkness has not comprehended it.

So begins the Gospel according to St John the Theologian. We read this at Pascha. It is one of my favourite passages. There is a depth in this that is salted all the way through all the Johannine scripture. For this sake he is called "The Theologian". St. John was familiar with the other three Gospels (called the Synoptics) and did not desire to repeat their material. He sought rather to supply the things missing. Jesus spoke differently in Jerusalem than He spoke in Galilee. The synoptics mostly cover what happened in Galilee, except for the Holy Week events. John was interested in showing some of the private conversations that Jesus had. And John focused on Jesus ministry in Jerusalem. John would move seamlessly from Jesus teaching to comments on what Jesus said without pointing out the difference. This was no problem for 1700 years of the Church. It is one of those things that drives modern scholars batty. But no one cared till they brought it up. It is through John that we know that Jesus' ministry was 3 + years. John tells us the liturgical cycle, whereas the synoptics are only interested in the Feast of Booths, because the Transfiguration happened at that time. If we only had the

synoptics, we would assume that Jesus ministry was for only 1.5 years. St. John was the only one of the 12 Apostles who died a natural death.

CHRIST IS RISEN !!!

This is the last Sunday that we will greet each other this way. Wednesday is the leave-taking of the feast; Ascension is Thursday. Yet even though we change our greetings, we must remember that every Sunday is a celebration of the Resurrection.

And God said unto Isaiah. Go to the people and say: Hear, and in hearing do not understand; See, and in seeing do not perceive. . . . then I said: How long, O Lord? “Until cities are deserted without inhabitant, and houses without men, and the land is utterly desolate, ... ”

The Light Who enlightens mankind is come to the world. This is important to the Gospel of John. It is also important to the blind man, for the Light visited him personally.

And seeing one born blind, the disciples start playing armchair theologian: Who sinned? This is a question that people have been asking for a long time, from Job (some of the oldest texts in the Old Testament), to Jeremiah, to our present day tabloids. We live in a calvinist society where we think (even though if we consciously thought about it we'd deny it), never-the-less we live and make policy as if those who were prosperous were blessed, and those who were not had somehow sinned, were bad, or were not worthy, or were not deserving. We want to blame because it makes us feel safer; because, if somewhere in our mind, people

are to blame for their misfortune, then somehow we are exempt; we think we are off the hook, that it will not happen to us. We hear of judges who excuse the crimes of the wealthy and dole out to the poor the harshest of sentences. Even though it is not our conscious thought, it is never-the-less written into our culture in ways we often do not notice. This sort of thought was not unknown in the ancient world – but there were passages from the writings and the prophets that rebutted it. Nor is it, as some have suggested, that the Blind man was predestined to be Blind so Jesus could do this miracle. Yet in this miracle, God is glorified.

Job does not sin, yet his wealth and children, and health are gone. His wife is no consolation, telling him, essentially, die. His friends are sure that Job did something to cause this. Job did nothing to cause it – and he is vindicated in the end.

Jeremiah: In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge. But every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge. Jer 31:29-30. No, Shakespeare did not come up with that phrase, Jeremiah did. Ezekiel says similar things.

Yet this understanding still infected the disciples. And they had heard from the healing of the Paralytic Jesus say: Go and sin no more. It would have been easy for them to hear this in conjunction with their previous beliefs and connect dots that should not be connected.

Yet, this man, Celidonius, did not go blind; he was born blind; he did not have the opportunity to sin. This got the disciples to

thinking. . . . to them, suffering was somehow evil. . . Jesus points out that it is not so, that his suffering is not the result of evil. And through his suffering God is to be glorified. . . . That the works of God might be manifest in him. Indeed, it is through suffering that Christ will reconcile humanity to Himself. This is something we need to confront in ourselves. Many of us have had sufferings. our suffering may not be the result of evil that we have done (though it may). As with Job, God is not the author of our sufferings. Yet as we allow God to transform us, God can take our sufferings and bring out of us a beauty we did not know was there . . . if we will only let Him.

Jesus, in the previous chapter of the Gospel told the pharisees that He was the Light of the world. Now, away from the pharisees for the moment He says “While I am in the world, I am the Light of the world. Part of the reason this Gospel finds its place before Ascension is that we know what will happen this coming Thursday. The Light of the world will return to His Father and will take to His Father an offering of our humanity that has been sanctified. And as Jesus had told His detractors, “The children of the bridal chamber cannot mourn So long as the Bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.”

And then, to show that He is the Word by Whom all things were created, He spits in the dust and makes mud or clay and refashions eyes; He anoints; He Christofies the eyes of the man born with defective eyes; according to the exaposition from last night he had neither sight nor eyes, and they had to be made, not just healed. Unlike the Paralytic, He does not ask the man if he wants to be healed, nor does He promise healing. He simply

sends him to the pool to wash as an act of obedience. And here again, water figures into the story. And the fathers understand the pool of Siloam to be a figure of baptism.

The man comes back seeing. He is illumined, not just physically but also spiritually. Having washed, he encounters Grace.

Now, just as last week with the Samaritan Woman, the Blind man becomes an evangelist. For Jesus not only opened his physical eyes, but also his spiritual eyes. He was a simple beggar (for that is all society would let him do, just like the Paralytic two weeks ago); He was looked down upon and discounted. But now he confounds the pharisees (the doctors of the law) with his statements and questions – the same pharisees that were confounded by Jesus a week and a half ago in the middle of the feast. . . He could see. The pharisees, for all their physical sight, could not see. They were blind. Jesus healed on the Sabbath. The pharisees could not see past this.

The pharisees began to use all the rhetorical tricks they knew to somehow invalidate the miracle that had been performed by Jesus. (Some of those rhetorical tricks are still used today.) They wanted verification of his birth; they called his parents. “Is this YOUR SON whom YOU SAY was born blind?” It was as if they were accusing the parents of blinding their son after he was born.

Then when the parents verify their son and his blindness they try again: “GIVE GLORY TO GOD! We know that this man is a sinner!” They say ‘Give glory to God.’ but they are really asking the man to blaspheme God.

The man born blind responds with humility, saying only what he knows while not agreeing with their conclusions. Then they badger the witness, asking him what they've already asked. This simple beggar refused to be badgered. He then turns it back on the Pharisees: "Why do you ask again? do you want to be His disciples too?"

The pharisees are still trying to "prove" Jesus to be a sinner. The man born blind puts forth that a sinner could not do what He just did. Not even Moses healed a man born blind.

And with that, this simple beggar shows himself to be wiser than the pharisees. And . . . they . . . can't stand it. . . . "You were utterly born in sin, and you dare to teach us?" They tried to shame him and called him an S.O.B and threw him out. The Pharisees embody the warnings of Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount of condemning the splinter in the eyes of another while totally missing the log in their own.

Jesus then finds the man and completes his illumination. As He revealed Himself to the Samaritan woman last week, so now He reveals Himself to the man born blind. This is the first time that the man actually sees Jesus, though he recognizes His voice. Celidonius would later go with Lazarus (yes, the Lazarus that Jesus raised), and Massilia, helping two Saints who became bishops in Cyprus and in Gaul.

Jesus makes a reference to the prophesy of Isaiah that I quoted at the beginning: See and in seeing perceive not; hear and in hearing understand not. . . . ". . .and those who see may become

blind.” . . . The pharisees overhear that and respond with “Oh, so we’re blind?!” Jesus tells them that because they assume they can see that they are responsible for their sin as if they could really see it. Their assumption that they can see prevents them from exploring the many ways they are blind. This miracle had been done before them, and they refused to see. And Christ calls their refusal to see a sin. By their inability to bring to Christ their own blindness, they kept their spiritual blindness. It is NOT the man born blind who has sinned, neither his parents. But to refuse to see, to be blind by choice IS sin.

In seeing that the blind man was illumined in spirit: How do our eyes work for seeing the deeper things of God? What can we not see? And Who can we not see? What can we not even perceive that we aren’t seeing? For the most part we prefer darkness to the light, for darkness is more comfortable than light – in the light we can see things we’d rather not see. The light shines in darkness; and the darkness has not comprehended it.

We live in a culture that discourages self examination, of looking at ourselves, at what passions are driving us. We live in a society that encourages intentional blindness and fear. Instead, our culture prefers chaos, and would rather sell stuff to our passions than to have us look at what choices the passions are making for us. We live in a culture that would rather make empty accusations than examine what has really happened. We live in a culture that would rather us not see. Yet, to grow spiritually we need to look at those very things. To break the cycle of greed, lust, envy we need to look into ourselves honestly and see the uncomfortable things (both good and bad) about us, . . . and to

own those things . . . and bring them to God . . . and work with Him . . . to let those things be healed.

It is not enough that we become well adjusted to our darkness, as the Blind Man had become.. Christ has come to give sight to the blind.

Sometimes our blindness is to protect ourselves from what would be too overwhelming to see. This blindness God can also heal. . . as we learn to trust God, what was overwhelming becomes possible to face. Bit by bit, step by step God helps us to open our eyes. God does not overwhelm us with His Light. Instead He gives sight. God does not show us our passions to condemn us, but to heal and save us, and to bring us eternal life.

But, God cannot heal our blindness if we think, like the Pharisees, that we can see; we must be humble and admit to our blindness. Only then, through prayer will God take away our blindness. And then seeing, we must deal with what we see. We must cleanse ourselves of the dust and the cobwebs and dirt that we could not see before.

To Him Who IS the Light that illumines mankind and who illumines both us the Blind Man be all glory honour and worship, now and ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen

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