

Sermon

Man Born Blind (John 9:1-38)

May 29, 2022

Christ is Risen!

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness. (Gen 1:26)

Then God formed man out of the dust from the ground. (Gen 2:7)

In the image of God He made him; male and female He made them. (Gen 1:26-27)

And Adam and Eve lived in Paradise.

*(beat)*

Then things went awry. Adam and Eve had received the gift of free will. In exercising that free will they listened to the temptation of Satan to do that which had been forbidden to them by God. Their expulsion from Paradise and all the rest, as they say, is history. We hear their story – really the story of fallen mankind – every year in the first week of Lent.

St. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyon at the end of the second century, was among the first to write about today's Gospel reading as a microcosm of man's creation from dust, his imperfections, and his return to fulness through Baptism, the laver of regeneration. As a Christian youth in Smyrna, Irenaeus was a student of Polycarp, who in turn had learned directly from St. John the Evangelist. As a Bishop, Irenaeus wrote an extensive work *Against Heresies*, in which is found the following, which I paraphrase.

While walking on the road with His disciples, Jesus came across a man who was blind since his birth. Most commentaries attribute the lack of sight to the fact of the man being born with no eyes at all. His blindness is a physical deficiency, not the result of any sin on the part of either his parents or himself – as Jesus Himself explains when questioned by his disciples. The man is here as an opportunity for Jesus to do “the work of Him Who sent me.” For “as long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

As we are told in the Psalms and by Isaiah and by Jeremiah (Ps. 21:10-11; Is. 44:2; Jer. 1:5), each person is formed by God in their mother’s womb. This man’s physical formation had been incomplete. To complete the man’s formation and thereby show His creative power, Jesus made clay with his saliva and the dust of the ground, packed the clay into the man’s eyes and told the man to go wash in the Pool of Siloam. The clay was not magic – it did not do the healing. The man received his sight – his eyes – when he obeyed Jesus and washed off the clay in the pool – after attracting many curious onlookers along the way, I’m sure. The man, having been given eyes to see, engaged with the Pharisees and confessed that Jesus – whom he had not yet seen – must be from God.

St. Irenaeus writes,

“For the Lord Who formed the visual powers is he Who made the whole man, carrying out the will of the Father. And inasmuch as man, with respect to that formation which was after Adam, having fallen into transgression, needed the laver of regeneration, [the Lord] said to him, after he had smeared his eyes with clay, “Go to Siloam, and wash;” thus restoring to him both his perfect confirmation, and that regeneration which takes place by means of the laver.” (Ante-Nicene Fathers, p. 543)

The Pharisees were indignant and wanted to trap Jesus. They questioned the onlookers, the man himself, his parents. But the man taught the Pharisees, “We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshipper of God and does His will, He hears him. Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind. If this man were not from God, He could do nothing.” (John 9:31-33) And when he finally saw Jesus, Jesus confirmed that He Himself is the Son of God.

In the next few verses after today’s reading Jesus says,

“For judgement have I come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind.” Then some of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these words, and said to Him, “Are we blind also?” Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, ‘We see.’ Therefore your sin remains.” (John 9:39-41)

We have been created by God from the dust of the earth in their Own image. We are not yet complete in likeness to God. We have been told to stand up and walk, and to sin no more. We have been given the Water of Life in Christ Jesus. And through our Baptism our eyes have been opened. May we share the coming joy of the disciples as they watched Jesus being carried up into heaven from Mount Olivet and “were continually in the temple blessing God.” (Luke24:53)

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