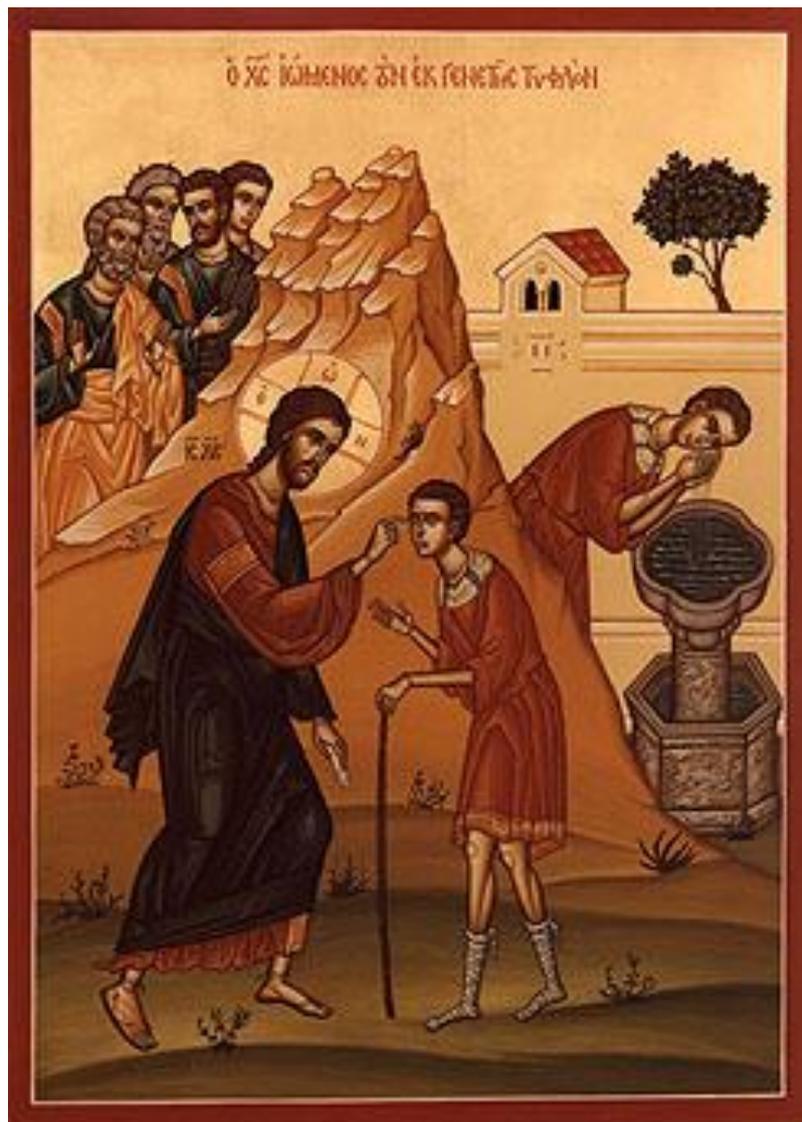


The Man Born Blind

John 9:1-41

“I am the light of the world”

“One thing I do know is that I was blind and now I see.”



Introductions:

Start the session in darkness and have total silence for a couple of minutes.

We do not like the darkness. It makes us feel uncomfortable; it challenges our insecurities, eg. waking up suddenly in the nighttime what do we instinctively do – look for light.

As is probably apparent by now the key theme this week is Darkness and Light.

Prayer of Mother Teresa:

Dear Jesus, help us to spread your fragrance everywhere we go. Flood our souls with your spirit and life. Penetrate and possess our whole being so utterly that our lives may only be a radiance of yours. Shine through us and be so in us that every soul we come in contact with may feel your presence in our soul. Let them look up and see no longer us, but only Jesus. Stay with us and then we shall begin to shine as you shine, so to shine as to be light to others. The light, O Jesus, will be all from you. None of it will be ours. It will be you shining on others through us. Let us thus praise you in the way you love best by shining on those around us. Let us preach you without preaching, not by words, but by our example; by the catching force - the sympathetic influence of what we do, the evident fullness of the love our hearts bear to you. Amen.

Scripture Passage:

John 9:1-41

1 As he passed by he saw a man blind from birth. ¹

2 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ²

3 Jesus answered, "Neither he nor his parents sinned; it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him.

4 We have to do the works of the one who sent me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work.

5 While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

6 When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva, and smeared the clay on his eyes,

7 and said to him, "Go wash ³ in the Pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed, and came back able to see.

8 His neighbours and those who had seen him earlier as a beggar said, "Isn't this the one who used to sit and beg?"

9 Some said, "It is," but others said, "No, he just looks like him." He said, "I am."

10 So they said to him, "(So) how were your eyes opened?"

11 He replied, "The man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and told me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' So I went there and washed and was able to see."

12 And they said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I don't know."

13 They brought the one who was once blind to the Pharisees.

14 Now Jesus had made clay ⁴ and opened his eyes on a Sabbath.

15 So then the Pharisees also asked him how he was able to see. He said to them, "He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and now I can see."

16 So some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, because he does not keep the Sabbath." (But) others said, "How can a sinful man do such signs?" And there was a division among them.

17 So they said to the blind man again, "What do you have to say about him, since he opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet."

18 Now the Jews did not believe that he had been blind and gained his sight until they summoned the parents of the one who had gained his sight.

19 They asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How does he now see?"

20 His parents answered and said, "We know that this is our son and that he was born blind.

21 We do not know how he sees now, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him, he is of age; he can speak for himself."

22 His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone acknowledged him as the Messiah, he would be expelled from the synagogue. ⁵

23 For this reason his parents said, "He is of age; question him."

24 So a second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, "Give God the praise! ⁶ We know that this man is a sinner."

25 He replied, "If he is a sinner, I do not know. One thing I do know is that I was blind and now I see."

26 So they said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"
27 He answered them, "I told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?"
28 They ridiculed him and said, "You are that man's disciple; we are disciples of Moses!"
29 We know that God spoke to Moses, but we do not know where this one is from."
30 The man answered and said to them, "This is what is so amazing, that you do not know where he is from, yet he opened my eyes."
31 We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if one is devout and does his will, he listens to him.
32 It is unheard of that anyone ever opened the eyes of a person born blind.⁷
33 If this man were not from God, he would not be able to do anything."
34 They answered and said to him, "You were born totally in sin, and are you trying to teach us?" Then they threw him out.
35 When Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, he found him and said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"
36 He answered and said, "Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?"
37 Jesus said to him, "You have seen him and the one speaking with you is he."
38 He said, "I do believe, Lord," and he worshiped him.
39 Then Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see might see, and those who do see might become blind."⁸
40 Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not also blind, are we?"
41 Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you are saying, 'We see,' so your sin remains.

Footnotes:

¹ [9:1-10:21] Sabbath healing of the man born blind. This sixth sign is introduced to illustrate the saying, "I am the light of the world" ([John 8:12](#); [9:5](#)). The narrative of conflict about Jesus contrasts Jesus (light) with the Jews (blindness, [John 9:39-41](#)). The theme of water is reintroduced in the reference to the pool of Siloam. Ironically, Jesus is being judged by the Jews, yet the Jews are judged by the Light of the world; cf [John 3:19-21](#).

Cf. Genesis 1:1-5

² [2] See the note on [John 5:14](#), and [Exodus 20:5](#), that parents' sins were visited upon their children. Jesus denies such a cause and emphasizes the purpose: the infirmity was providential.

[4] Night will come with the crucifixion; and will remain until the resurrection.

³ [7] Go wash: perhaps a test of faith; cf [2 Kings 5:10-14](#). The water tunnel Siloam (= Sent) is used as a symbol of Jesus, sent by his Father.

⁴ [14] In using spittle, kneading clay, and healing, Jesus had broken the Sabbath rules laid down by Jewish tradition, ie. he had undertaken manual work.

Cf. Genesis 2:7

⁵ [22] This comment of the evangelist (in terms used again in [John 12:42](#); [John 16:2](#)) envisages a situation after Jesus' ministry. Rejection / excommunication from the synagogue of Jews who confessed Jesus as Messiah seems to have begun c. A.D. 85, when the curse against the minim or heretics was introduced into the "Eighteen Benedictions."

⁶ [24] Give God the praise!: an Old Testament formula of adjuration to tell the truth; cf [Joshua 7:19](#); [1 Sam 6:5](#) LXX. Cf [John 5:41](#).

⁷ [32] A person born blind: the only Old Testament cure from blindness is found in Tobit (cf [Tobit 7:7](#); [11:7-13](#); [14:1-2](#)), but Tobit was not born blind.

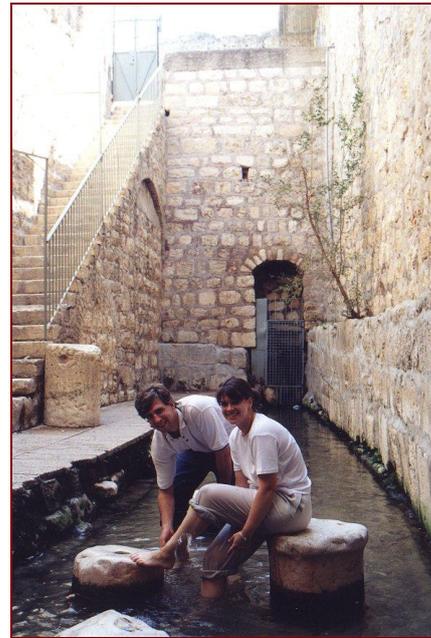
[30 – 33] Sensus Fidelium

[34] The Pharisees have clearly lost the argument. They resort to personal attack on the blind man, and then throw him out.

⁸ [39-41] These verses spell out the symbolic meaning of the cure; the Pharisees are not the innocent blind, willing to accept the testimony of others.

Commentary:

After one controversy in the Temple, Jesus walked the streets of Jerusalem and stumbled upon a man born blind. Immediately, Jesus cured him with mud and a washing. [9:1,6-7] (*The blind man washed in the Pool of Siloam or the "sent" pool. As part of an aqueduct system built over the centuries for Jerusalem, this pool was the "receiving tank" for the water. Hence, its name; the aqueduct "sent" water to the pool.*)



The Pool of Siloam

The man returned to his neighbourhood when another controversy erupted. The blind man's neighbours forced him to defend his cure. [9:8-9] According to 9:8, the man's neighbours saw the man beg on a daily basis. Most of the neighbours would have known him from birth. When the man demonstrated his cure (and his freedom from begging) to his neighbours, he was met with incredulity.

Some do not recognise the man. He is changed in some radical way. (Compare this with Jesus after the resurrection, when he was not recognised by even some of his closest followers. This is also the case with many people who undergo a radical change / conversion. That can't be him he is so different from how he used to be. Think of St Francis of Assisi! They thought he had gone mad!)

Because of the controversy, the neighbours brought the cured man before the Pharisees for a judgement [9:14]. They were to sit in judgement over one question: Was the beggar a fraud? However, many asked another question: Was the Healer a sinner? By answering this second question, they could answer the first question.

A group within the Pharisees began their attack with a point of the Law [9:16]. Since Jesus cured on the Sabbath, this group charged, he violated the Third Commandment:

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labour, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work.

The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.

As a violator of the Law, the Pharisees were suggesting that Jesus had sinned. As a sinner, he stood outside the Jewish community. So, Jesus and his disciple would have to be excommunicated cf. 9:22.

The cured man bravely associated Jesus with God. He declared Jesus was a prophet [9:17].

The hearing continues in 9:18-33. In the end, the man questioned the sight (i.e., wisdom) of those in judgement. In other words, he questioned their authority to judge Jesus. The Pharisees rebuked the man, claiming he was born in sin, and, so, unfit to question their authority [9:34]. Whether they referred to the man's own sinfulness or the sinful condition of the world (what we call "Original Sin") is unclear.

"Since you were born in sin..." (that is, born with a blindness caused by sin). The Pharisees implicitly equated the man's blindness to his own immorality or that of his parents. (In 9:2-3, Jesus rejected this notion.) In doing so, they implicitly acknowledged Jesus' power to cure the blind man and to forgive sin. For, the logic goes, if one truly cured the illness (blindness), then he must have eliminated the cause of the illness (sin).

The Pharisees excommunicated the man and so now he stood alone [9:34b]. Without membership in the synagogue, he was no longer a Jew; he would be shunned by his friends and neighbours alike. For his defence of Jesus, all he had left was Jesus. So Jesus sought him out and asked him the question of faith: "Do you believe in the Son of Man (i.e., Messiah)?" The man answered with a question: "Who is he, Lord, so I might trust...him." Jesus then seemed to say: "Open your eyes. The Messiah is talking to you now." With this revelation, the man professed his trust in Jesus and worshiped him [9:35-38].

Pharisaic Logic:

- You are blind and therefore sinful.
- The man who gave you sight (Jesus) is sinful because he broke the Sabbath.
- Only God could have restored your sight to you
- But this man Jesus cannot be from God because he is sinful
- This does not compute. How can it be?

Even just following the logic of the Pharisees the only possible and obvious answer (which they were not prepared to admit) was that Jesus was from God.

This fact was unsettling and unnerving for the Pharisees. To admit what was staring them in the face would upset their whole world view, and this can be a very hard thing to do.

When the Blind Man bravely and frankly points out the obvious to them:

26 So they said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"

27 He answered them, "I told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?"

28 They ridiculed him and said, "You are that man's disciple; we are disciples of Moses!"

29 We know that God spoke to Moses, but we do not know where this one is from."

30 The man answered and said to them, "This is what is so amazing, that you do not know where he is from, yet he opened my eyes.

31 We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if one is devout and does his will, he listens to him.

32 It is unheard of that anyone ever opened the eyes of a person born blind.⁷

33 If this man were not from God, he would not be able to do anything."

They react by insulting him and throwing him out. How dare this sinner speak to them like this:

34 They answered and said to him, "You were born totally in sin, and are you trying to teach us?" Then they threw him out.

Jesus was a threat to the Establishment, the status quo. This incident no doubt caused great concern among the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem. Throughout history what has been the reaction by those in authority to such threats? They seek to destroy / kill the cause of the threat – Thomas of Canterbury, Archbishop Oscar Romero, Thomas Moore, the very long list goes on.

Exercise:

There are many similarities with last week's passage from John Chapter 4:5-42 and that of the story of the Blind man. Let us split into groups and explore these similarities:

Outcast:

The Woman at the Well and the Blind Man were outcasts, on the fringes of their respective societies.

Water:

13 *Jesus said to her, "Every one who drinks of this water will thirst again,
14 but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."
15 The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw."*

Prophet:

19 *The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet....
25 The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ); when he comes, he will show us all things."*

17 *So they said to the blind man again, "What do you have to say about him, since he opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet."*

Declaration:

26 *Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."*

Jesus tells the Blind Man that I AM the Son of Man i.e. the Messiah.

The phrase "I AM" echoes the Hebrew name for God, יהוה (YHWH).

Belief and Conversion:

42 *They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world."*

The Blind Man says:

25 *He replied, "If he is a sinner, I do not know. One thing I do know is that I was blind and now I see."*

35 *When Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, he found him and said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"*

36 *He answered and said, "Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?"*

37 *Jesus said to him, "You have seen him and the one speaking with you is he."*

38 *He said, "I do believe, Lord," and he worshiped him.*

Last week Jesus converted many Samaritans from the city of Sy'char in Samaria. This week he is converting people in Jerusalem. It is of note that the people in the Samaritan town were much more receptive to the Light than the Pharisees and the neighbours of the Blind Man in Jerusalem.

Closing Thoughts:

Jesus is the Light of the World. Jesus wants to make those who are blind, or who acknowledge that they are blind, able to see.

Those who currently see, or think that they see, he will make blind. Hopefully then they will come to see the True Light.

Jesus tells the Pharisees, by the very fact they think that they see, means that they are in fact blind. Unless they acknowledge their blindness they will enter further into darkness.

For those who convert to Catholicism becoming blind is a process you must go through, and it is sometimes a painful and difficult process. By choosing to follow Jesus our safe and secure view of the World is sometimes turned on its head and this can sometimes be a very hard reality to face.

Becoming blind requires you to rely more on your other senses. You must concentrate and focus more in order to function. You don't have the liberty of distraction. Blindness sharpens your other senses and makes you more aware and intuitive not less. However, it also means you have to have the humility to ask for assistance at times to help you on your way.

Cradle Catholics are fortunate in that they are born into the Light. It is their ancestors who at some time had to become blind in order to see. However, even cradle Catholics, as they grow, often come to a point where they must choose. They can choose the ways of the world – tempted by the sensual and physical - or the spiritual Way of Jesus. Many choose the former and then later come back to the latter, once they realise the Truth. We should pray often for cradle Catholics who have come to this juncture in their lives.

Many conversions are much more subtle than St Paul's but often just as dramatic and life changing.

- God made Paul physically blind so that he could see - Acts 9:1-8.
- Paul's sight was subsequently restored and he believed - Acts 9:17-22.

Conclusion:

The Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday is divided into four parts:

- 1) The Service of Light
- 2) Liturgy of the Word
- 3) Liturgy of Baptism
- 4) Liturgy of the Eucharist.

The first part of the Easter Vigil is The Service of Light:

The atmosphere in the church is different: the holy water fonts are drained, all the lights are out, and the tabernacle is empty. The service begins outside the church. A new fire is lit and blessed.

The Priest prepares the Paschal Candle.

The priest lights the candle from the new fire, saying:
May the light of Christ, rising in glory,
dispel the darkness of our hearts and minds.

The candle is then processed through the church, with the deacon lifting the candle at three different times, singing: Christ our light (Lumen Christi) and the congregation sings in reply: Thanks be to God (Deo gratias).

Everyone lights their candle from the Easter candle and continue in procession until the whole church is alight. The Paschal candle symbolizes Christ, the Light of the World.

Next follows the glorious Easter song of the Catholic Church: **the Exsultet** (*Easter proclamation*). This is usually sung by the deacon.

Exsultet (*excerpts*):

Rejoice, heavenly powers! Sing choirs of angels!
Exult, all creation around God's throne!
Jesus Christ, our King is risen!
Sound the trumpet of salvation!
Rejoice, O earth, in shining splendour,
radiant in the brightness of your King!
Christ has conquered! Glory fills you!
Darkness vanishes forever!

Rejoice, O Mother Church! Exult in glory!
The risen Saviour shines upon you!
Let this place resound with joy,
echoing the mighty song of all God's people!

For Christ has ransomed us with his blood,
and paid for us the price of Adam's sin
to our eternal Father!

This is night,
when Christians everywhere,
washed clean of sin and freed from all defilement,
are restored to grace and grow together in holiness.

This is the night,
when Jesus broke the chains of death
and rose triumphant from the grave.

What good would life have been to us,
had Christ not come as our Redeemer?

Father, how wonderful your care for us!
How boundless your merciful love!
To ransom a slave you gave away your Son.

The power of this holy night
dispels all evil, washes guilt away,
restores lost innocence, brings mourners joy;
it casts out hatred, brings us peace,
and humbles earthly pride.

Accept this Easter candle,
a flame divided but undimmed,
a pillar of fire that glows to the honour of God.

Let it mingle with the lights of heaven
and continue bravely burning
to dispel the darkness of this night!

May the Morning Star which never sets
find this flame still burning:
Christ, that Morning Star,
who came back from the dead,
and shed his peaceful light on all mankind,
your Son, who lives and reigns forever and ever.
R. Amen.

Concluding Blessing