

Scripture Study

Fourth Sunday of Lent – Cycle A



Opening prayer

1 Samuel 16:1b, 6-7,10-13a

(Ps 23:1-6)

Ephesians 5:8-14

John 9:1-41

Overview of the Gospel:

- In this Sunday's gospel reading, Jesus is in Jerusalem for the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:10), a feast marked by the lighting of large candelabra and torchlight processions. He is in the temple with his disciples on the Sabbath a few months before his Passion.
- While in the temple, Jesus heals a blind man using clay made from his own saliva, which he smears on (literally, "anoints") the blind man's eyes. Jesus instructs the blind man to wash in the pool of Siloam and the blind man is cured. The blind man, acting first out of trust and obedience, comes to believe in Jesus as Lord. Jesus enemies, however, miss the significance of the cure, instead focusing on its perceived illegality (verses 14, 16. See Luke 13:16, 14:5).
- As the preceding Sunday's reading focused on "water" (John 4:5-42. See also John 7:37), the theme of "light" is emphasized here (see John 8:12). Also, as in the case of the Samaritan woman, the blind man has a progression of faith (verses 11, 17, 33, 35). The Pharisees that are opposing Jesus, however, have their own faith progression, moving from mere doubt (verse 16) to blasphemy (verse 24) to injustice (verse 34).

Questions:

- In the 1st Reading, how does Samuel let superficial appearances influence his judgment? How am I too quick to let my prejudices and preconceptions limit God's work in my life?
- In the 2nd Reading what does St. Paul mean when he refers to "light"? To "darkness"? How are, or how can, each of these be operative in each of our lives?
- In the Gospel Reading, what assumptions lie behind the disciple's question (verse 1)? What does Jesus' answer reveal about how he views the blind man's suffering?
- In this story, what are "the works of God" (verse 3)? The "night" that is coming (verse 4)? The "light of the world" (verse 5)? How are sin and suffering related?
- Note the conflicting claims to knowledge and certainty on the parts of the Pharisees, the parents, and the man born blind. What is each party sure of? Not sure of? In response to the man's growing spiritual insight, how are the Pharisees progressing? Which way is *your* faith progressing?
- When you hear of another's misfortune, do you react like the disciples of Jesus? Why?
- What physical or emotional misfortune in your life has turned into an opportunity for God to demonstrate his power?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 575, 588, 595-96, 1504, 2173, 2827

Closing Prayer

Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings this week!

What an example of firm faith the blind man gives us! A living, operative faith. Do you behave like this when God commands, when so often you cannot see, when your soul is worried and the light is gone? ...But this man believed; he acted upon the command of God, and he returned with his eyes full of light.
—St. Josemaria Escriva

"For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see"

Scripture: *John 9:1-41*

Meditation: What's worse: physical blindness or moral and spiritual darkness? Sin clouds the mind in darkness and closes the heart to God's love and truth. Only in the light of God's truth can we see sin for what it really is, a rejection of God and opposition to his will. The Pharisees equated physical blindness and sickness with sin. While the scriptures indicate that sin can make the body and mind sick as well as the soul, not all sickness, however is the result of sin. Sickness befalls us for a variety of reasons. Paul the Apostle reminds us that "in everything God works for good with those who love him" (Romans 8:28) One of the most remarkable miracles of Jesus is the healing of the man who was blind from birth. Even the blind man, once cured, marveled and proclaimed that "never since the world began has it been heard that any one opened the eyes of a man born blind" (John 9:32). This miracle remarkably reveals the power and glory of God.

Why did Jesus use his own spittle in healing this man? Jesus wanted to identify with this man's misery and to draw faith and confidence in him as well. He covers his eyes with clay and bids him to wash in the Pool of Siloam. This pool was one of the landmarks of Jerusalem. Hezekiah had a secret tunnel bored through 583 yards of solid rock in the hillside in order to bring water from the Gihon Spring, which was outside the city walls, into the city proper (2Chr.32:2-8,30; Isa.22:9-11; 2Kgs.20:20). At the Feast of Sukkoth (also known as the Festival of Tabernacles or Booths) water from this pool was brought by one of the priests to the temple with great trumpet blasts while the people recited the words of Isaiah 12:3: "With joy you will draw water from



the wells of salvation." It was poured together with wine beside the altar and ultimately flowed into the Kidron Valley. This was both a thanksgiving offering for the summer harvest and a petition that God would continue to provide water and growth for the newly planted seeds for the next harvest. It was during the Feast of Sukkoth that Jesus identified himself as the source of this life-giving water (John 7:37). Jesus gave not only physical sight to the blind man, but spiritual vision as well. That is why Jesus proclaimed himself the "light of the world" (John 9:4). This miracle at the Pool of Siloam points to the source of the miraculous life-giving water which Jesus offers through the gift of the Holy Spirit (John 7:38). Do you thirst for this life-giving water?

The Pharisees were upset with Jesus on two counts. First, he healed the blind man on the Sabbath, which they considered a violation of the Sabbath rest. Second, how could a sinner and a Sabbath-breaker do such a marvelous work of God! The cured man must not have really been blind at all! This blind man was well known to many people and his parents testified under oath that he had indeed been blind since birth. Their prejudice made them blind to

God's intention for the Sabbath and to Jesus' claim to be the One sent from the Father in heaven to bring freedom and light to his people. They tried to intimidate both this cured man and his parents by threatening them with excommunication from the synagogue. This man was ostracized by the religious authorities because he gave witness to the Lord Jesus in his life. John Chrysostom, commenting on this passage, remarked: "The Jews (the Pharisees) cast him out of the Temple; the Lord of the Temple found him." If our witness of Jesus and his redeeming power in our lives separates us from our fellow neighbors, it nonetheless draws us nearer to Jesus himself. Paul the Apostles warns us to avoid the darkness of sin that we might walk more clearly in the light of Christ (Ephes. 5:8-12). Do you allow any blind spots to blur your vision of what God is offering you and requiring of you?

Jesus is ever ready to heal us and to free us from the darkness of sin and deception. There is no sickness, whether physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual that the Lord Jesus does not identify with. Isaiah prophesied that the "Suffering Servant" would be bruised for our iniquities and by his stripes we would be healed (Isaiah 53:5). The Lord offers us freedom from spiritual blindness due to sin and he restores us to wholeness of body, mind, soul, and heart.

"Jesus, in your name the blind see, the lame walk, and the dead are raised to life. Come into our lives and heal the wounds of our broken hearts. Give us eyes of faith to see your glory and hearts of courage to bring you glory in all we say and do."

Meditation: © 2011 Don Schwager
www.rc.net/wcc/readings/