

Fourth Sunday of Lent

The central theme of today's readings is that God makes everything new in and through Jesus Christ. We are children of the light baptized into the glory that is Christ. We are initiated into the life of Christ who is the light of the world. Once we are baptized in Christ we become his new creation, the members of God's own family. Today as we enter the fourth Sunday of Lent we are called upon to renew ourselves and experience the loving invitation of our Lord.

In the early church those to be baptized and public sinners were called upon to understand that Jesus alone is the new life. The Gospel of today presents Jesus as the light of the world. We have today the marvelous story about the cure of a man born blind. Jesus tells them that he must perform the works of him who sent him while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work. Once the blind man is cured, he is able to see Jesus as his Lord, something the religious leaders were unable to do.

The story of the man born blind is clearly one of the real masterpieces of Johannine storytelling. The inner dynamic of the story shows the blind man in the process of coming to sight and faith in the son of man, while at the same time the Jewish leaders move towards blindness. Jesus sets the tone for the story by indicating that the man was born blind so the works of God may be made visible through him. Through this passage John presents Jesus as the light of the world.

John's aim in presenting us with this marvelous story about the cure of a man born blind is to show Jesus as our light. Little attention is given to the actual healing miracle itself. When he is cured, he sees all material things around him and also is able to see Jesus as his Lord, something the religious leaders were unable to do. John narrates that as Jesus and His disciples were walking along, they encountered the blind man. The disciples ask Jesus the reason for his blindness: whether it is his own sins or the sins of his parents. During the time of Jesus the popular belief was that there was a close link between sins and a chronic sickness or disability and that the sins of the parents could have their effects on their children. We remember when the paralyzed man was let down through the roof at the feet of Jesus seeking to be healed of his disability, surprisingly, Jesus' first words to him were, "Your sins are forgiven." Here Jesus

clarifies the meaning of suffering in the life of a person. The blindness of the person has nothing to do with his sins or those of his parents. He is blind so that God's power might be seen at work in him.

From these words, three things are made known. First of all, through the miraculous cure of the blind man, Jesus was identifying Himself as the Divine Light. Secondly, through the words, "we must work," Jesus was reminding His disciples that it was also their duty to perform the works of God. Thirdly, by stating, "While it is day," Jesus was indicating that the grace of God was at work while the Divine Light was present, therefore facilitating the conversion of those who were present. When the grace and the Light of God are no longer present, nor the light that is being carried by Christians, there is spiritual darkness. Then Jesus does something very human. He spits on the ground, makes mud-paste with saliva and spreads the mud on the man's eyes and tells him to go and wash himself in the pool of Siloam, which means "sent."

The entire story of healing places before us an important human problem namely the problem of suffering and the way Jesus removes the suffering from the person. While the primary theme is healing and light, we have a person who experiences the patience, understanding, selflessness, compassion, kindness, mercy, pity, empathy and concern of Jesus.

Beyond his physical suffering the blind man has to endure the misunderstanding and rejection by his own people while Jesus gives him the positive hope. The blind man of the gospel story seems to have acquired many of the virtues that can come through suffering. The man's parents were prepared to sacrifice their integrity rather than suffer such a punishment. They knew that if anyone accepted Jesus as the Messiah they would be expelled from the synagogue.

Although the healing of the physical blindness of the person and his reduction of physical suffering was immediate, his growth in spiritual sight was gradual. He grew from his vague perception of the savior as the man called Jesus to boldly proclaiming that Jesus is a prophet and finally turning his back on his lack of parental support and the hostility of religious

leadership to recognize Jesus whom he had never actually seen face to face, as the Lord whom he worshipped.