



Welcome to our Eucharistic Celebration

The Fourth Sunday of Lent

March 26, 2017

Saint Mary of the Assumption Parish

Today's Scriptures

Today we have another story in which a person has an encounter with Jesus, comes to faith, and is transformed. Just like the Samaritan woman at the well in last week's Gospel, the man born blind was going about his normal routine when Jesus and his disciples passed by. The disciples used the man's blindness to question Jesus about the belief that misfortune is evidence of, and punishment for, sin. Jesus refuted this, saying that neither the sins of the man, nor of his parents, were to blame for the man's blindness. Instead, the man's condition presented an opportunity for the power of God to be made visible. Jesus then healed the man of his blindness.

The man's cure astonished his neighbors who struggled to recognize him as he moved about freely. Thus began a prolonged interrogation of the man by his neighbors and eventually by the Pharisees. The neighbors wanted to understand how he regained his sight, while the religious elders focused only on the fact that Jesus had cured him on the Sabbath, thereby breaking Jewish law. The Pharisees denounced Jesus, saying that his violation of the Law showed that he could not be from God. They repeatedly questioned the man, and his parents, looking for more evidence against Jesus, but the more the man repeated his story, the more he recognized the true identity of the one who healed him. By the time the man met Jesus again he was totally open to faith in him. He had come to believe that he had been healed by the Messiah. The Pharisees, stuck in their preoccupation with the Law, had completely missed seeing the power of God at work in their midst.

In the First Reading, the story of Samuel's selection of the young shepherd David as the new king of Israel reminds us that God's plans and intentions are not always obvious to us. When God sent Samuel to find a new king among the sons of Jesse, Samuel assumed that God had selected one of the seven impressive elder sons but God told Samuel that he judges by the heart, not by appearance. When he made his choice of the youngest son, God himself made David ready to be king by sending his Holy Spirit to the boy. From that point on, David, though not perfect, would be guided as king by his relationship with God.

The letter to the Ephesians is addressed to those who have already come to faith in Christ. Like the man cured of his blindness and David, the shepherd boy made king, those persons who know Jesus have been changed by faith. They now have the light of Christ's Spirit dwelling in them and that light is capable of producing much good. In response, the followers of Jesus must live in a way that is consistent with his light, finding ways to please God and avoiding the darkness where all were once captive.

Sunday Readings and Backgrounds

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

David is anointed king of Israel.

- Saul the first king anointed by Samuel is rejected by God for disobedience.
- God sends Samuel to Bethlehem to anoint Saul's successor. Samuel anoints David.
- The first reading is a story of seeing. God sees David as no one else sees him.

Responsorial Psalm: Ps. 23: 1-3, 3-4, 5, 6.

The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

Reading II: Ephesians 5:8-14

You are people of the light.

- The passage from Ephesians expands on the division between the sightless and the seeing.
- Those who believe in Jesus are children of light.
- With Christ they have been raised from the darkness of death and live in the light of Christ.

Gospel: John 9:1-41

Jesus gives us sight.

- At the start of today's Gospel story of the man born blind, the disciples believe that sin is the cause of the man's blindness. When Jesus gives the blind man sight, both the disciples and the blind man move from darkness into light.
- The Pharisees accuse Jesus of sin because he healed the blind man on the Sabbath. The man with new sight however sees more clearly, he calls Jesus a prophet.
- The Pharisees refuse to believe; they are truly blind.

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God's Unruly Works

Doesn't it seem strange that the man who was transformed in today's Gospel passage said nary a word until after he was healed? He didn't ask Jesus for a cure nor did he tell his tale of being relegated to begging as the odd-one-out in a world he had never seen. In the beginning, he was just there, the object of other people's judgment. He was just there for Jesus to see.

Jesus saw in him the potential of carrying God's works forward. Thus, continuing the work of the Creator he molded clay and touched the man. Using the mud as if it were the oil of anointing he smeared it on the man's useless eyes. This scriptural account bursts with images of creation, reminding the reader that everything begins with God's loving initiative. God always takes the first step.

The second step, acceptance, depends on humanity. The man who could not see was receptive to Jesus' word. He accepted Jesus' command although he could have had no clue as to the outcome of his obedience. He came back transformed.

That was when his troubles began. It's not easy for people to learn to see someone in a new way. The neighbors had adjusted quite well to the man's physical incapacity. When they encountered him with his faculties intact they doubted their own eyes and wondered about justice, about sin and just punishment. In the light of their confusion the man did the unthinkable: He identified himself not only as the one they had known but also as someone recreated in the image of the man who had brought about his transformation. He said, "I am."

They asked the question that solidified the controversy: "How were your eyes opened?" Although he repeated the six-part formula of his astonishing healing (Jesus made clay, anointed my eyes, told me go and wash, I went, I washed, and now I see), the short answer was "The man called Jesus." Because they couldn't understand that, they took him to the Pharisees.

The man called Jesus, the source of transformation, became the center of confusion and discord. The religious leaders, self-assured arbiters of true faith, found a quick and easy answer: "This work can't be from God because it was done on the Sabbath. Everyone knows that neither God nor man are allowed to work on that day."

Even some of the religious leaders choked on that answer. If the man called Jesus had brought about a great good, how could he be a sinner? So the authorities again questioned the

man. Insisting that he tell the truth, they prefaced their question with their own certainty: "We know that he is a sinner." The man-who-saw refused to go along with that description. He simply repeated what had happened to him: "I was blind, and now I see." He then took the liberty of offering his own theological commentary: "Never, ever, has anyone healed someone born blind! How could he do it without God's help?" His challenge to their rigid, dogmatic logic proved intolerable. To back up their unassailable orthodoxy they reminded the healed man that his condition was obvious — he was born blind, he was immersed in sin. How dare *he* instruct *them*? They then did the only thing that made sense to them: They excommunicated him, presumably for having been healed and for saying that the person who did it must be on God's side. The first time that Jesus approached this man it had been to offer him sight. Now, having heard that he was suffering for his sake, Jesus came to offer him solidarity and insight. As in their first encounter, Jesus took the initiative. He now asked if the seeing man believed in "the Son of Man," the one who was to come. In a scene that parallels the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, the man asks who that might be and Jesus identifies himself. Jesus' self-identification ratified what the man had told the leaders: Jesus had come from God. He could now whole-heartedly say "I do believe," a statement that could be translated as a profound and joyful shout, "I see!"

The man-who-saw was never named. The word used to describe him was "anthropos" the Greek word designating a human being without specifying gender, ethnicity or historical context. The man born blind is everyone. When we hear this Gospel we are challenged to figure out which part we are playing in the drama and which we wish to play. We may be people definitively bound by our unshakeable convictions. We may be people who wonder what God might be up to. We may choose to allow authorities to give us the answers. Regardless, we are invited to be anthropos, people who realize we are somehow blind and are willing to be given sight.

~Mary McGlone