

## 19 March 2023—The Fourth Sunday of Lent: John 9:1-41

Today's Gospel is unique. It is the second longest continuous narrative in the New Testament: the entire passage is John 9:1 through 10:21, 62 verses; today we have just the first 41 verses. We can think of it as a five-act play within a play. There are three scenes today and two in 10:1-21. Surprisingly, Jesus is not 'center stage' for most of today's reading; the focus is on the man born blind and his encounters with the crowd and Pharisees.

In the 1<sup>st</sup> act the man receives Jesus' muddy cure patiently and follows his instructions thoroughly. We do not know how the man went to the Siloam pool, blindly groped his way, or led by a friend. Either way, imagine the scene. A blind man, face covered with mud walked through town. He did not care what others thought as the mud oozed down his face. He was promised healing and for that nothing was too humiliating. His courage was challenged further as his neighbors, who knew him only as a blind beggar, were skeptical of his identity. Returning from the Siloam pool his hair was surely wet and disheveled; his face streaked, eyes red from the gritty mud, his stained shirt soaked through. He stood boldly before them. The man could now see; they could not. They were doubtful, he fearless: *I am the man!*

The 2<sup>nd</sup> act: Wanting a definitive answer, the neighbors took him to 'experts,' the Pharisees. He was not cowed. When asked he testified to what Jesus did: *He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed and now I see.* A simple story, but they rejected simplicity. They asked his opinion of Jesus, but they insisted on their answer not his. Refusing to believe him, they grilled his parents. Unlike their son, they were afraid. The man-born-blind answers their taunts and threats boldly; he will not be shamed. He sees their blind hypocrisy. His conclusion: *If this man were not from God, he could do nothing...* They insulted him, condemned him, and *drove him out.*

Now act three, the man's 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting with Jesus. As with a Shakespeare drama, the story has been building to an act three climax. The man can now see because Jesus created sight from blindness, pierced darkness with light. Jesus calls himself *Son of Man*, a Messianic title. The blind-man-who-now-sees responds, "...*Lord, I believe.*" *And he worshiped him.* This is the only instance in the Gospels in which Jesus is worshiped before his death and resurrection. Jesus said: *I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.*

Here are just two conclusions from today's Gospel. The first centers on the man. He was neither fearful nor ashamed. He was not disgraced by his former blindness and poverty nor afraid of the ignorant crowd. He was not humiliated to be seen with dirt on his face, mud in his eyes, and spit on his cheeks. He was not degraded by his messy post-healing appearance. The man refused to be debased by the 'powerful.' He did not play their games, did not lie to escape their hatred. The point is obvious: faith grows through perseverance in the face of fear, through trust in God's loving-kindness to transform shame. Fear and shame are stealthy, fierce enemies of our souls. Fear blinds us to God's goodness; shame doubts Christ's power to heal and restore, to overcome our darkness with his light, to transform our worst into blessing for ourselves and others. Fear and shame murder our souls, blind us to our own surpassing value in God's eyes!

The 2<sup>nd</sup> conclusion comes from the cure. Like the man born blind, neither fighting nor ignoring our fear and shame bring healing. Instead, we live the truth that fear and shame cannot withstand Christ's healing love. Whenever fear and shame arise, we give the fear and shame to Christ who will take and transform it. We keep on giving fear and shame to Christ, content with his way of healing, which may look quite messy even to ourselves, especially to those blinded by wealth, power, lust, and greed.

As the man, having received healing, we worship Jesus. Perhaps, as Bishop Anthony Bloom puts it in the book we study Wednesday evenings, a more accessible term is "cherish." We respond by cherishing Jesus Christ in thanksgiving for all that he has done and is doing "...for us and for our salvation." Leave fear and shame behind, keep on surrendering them to Christ; accept his healing love and walk in the light of new creation.

Let us pray: Lord our God, rescue us from ourselves and give us to you. Take away everything that draws us from you, especially our fear and shame, and give us those things that lead us to you; for the sake of Christ our Lord. Amen. (Abbot Louis de Blois, adapted)