

# The Young Blind Man

John 9:1-41

We are told that every 20 minutes, a person in this nation loses their eyesight, going blind completely. An estimated 1.1 million people in the United States are considered legally blind. Every year 50,000 Americans go blind. Cataracts are the world's most common cause of blindness and are responsible for the loss of vision of 20 million people around the world.

For most people the thought of going blind is a terrifying. The results of a recent poll say that most people would rather lose any of their other senses than lose their ability to see. I think it is safe to say, we all take our sight seriously. Because of that, the Gospel this weekend speaks to all of us a little more than usual.

Last week our Gospel introduced us to a fantastic story – the encounter Jesus had with the woman at the well. The conversation between the Samaritan woman and Jesus is very special on a lot of levels and it is also the longest conversation recorded that Jesus has with a woman. (It is very special and if you missed it, you need to go to the Church of the Good Shepherd website and read Mel's homily from last week.) I mention this because this week, Jesus takes an entirely different approach.

In John 9, Jesus is apparently leading his disciples into town and comes across the only "blind from birth" young man found in the Gospels. It is the Sabbath. Jesus stops in front of the blind man and begins. After his encounter with the woman at the well last week, you would think Jesus would engage this blind fellow. But he doesn't speak to him through the first seven verses.

"As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. <sup>2</sup> His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" <sup>3</sup> Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. <sup>4</sup> We<sup>[a]</sup> must work the works of him who sent me<sup>[b]</sup> while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. <sup>5</sup> As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." <sup>6</sup> When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, <sup>7</sup> saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam".

Jesus leads the Disciples into town and stops where the blind man is sitting and, most likely, was asking for some type of help, financial or otherwise. The blind man is NOT asking to be healed and seems not to know who Jesus is at all.

As written, Jesus begins to teach his Disciples. He leans over, spits in the dirt and makes small mud cakes that he will then place on the blind man's eyes. The mental picture of all of this is amazing. Can you imagine what this poor man was thinking? "Hey – hello you guys!! I am blind, not deaf. I can hear you talking about me and my parents! Hello. Hey – whoa. You just spit near me. Wait – what is it with the mud. Stop this..."

Jesus gives him some instructions. "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam." I would be thinking, of course I am going to wash. You spit in the dirt and put the mud on my eyes. The least you guys could do is help me to find some water (or antiseptic!) and reserve my spot on this sidewalk while I wash this mud off my face!" But look at the next verse. Then he went (he listened and obeyed) and washed and came back **ABLE TO SEE!!**

I cannot imagine his joy – his overwhelming joy! Think about being able to see for the first time. Hearing the sounds that have been all around you and now have the ability to see what those sounds are attached to. I recently had cataract surgery and the results blew me away! I had no idea what I had been missing! But, our "blind man since birth" was experiencing sight for the first time! Imagine that.

On the way back, he then runs into "neighbors", people who have seen him sitting in the same spot and, most likely, just walked around him for years. Some of them think it must be someone else, some are not sure, but all of them want to know what happened that gave him sight. He explains to them: This man put mud on my eyes so "I went, I washed, I received my sight". Basic and simple.

The "friends" are not happy with his answer, so they take him to the Pharisees who in turn want to know how he got his sight back. No rejoicing. No praise the Lord. No hugging. Just – explain this to us. So, he says the same thing. After he put mud on my eyes, I went, I washed, I received my sight.

The Pharisees then get into a heated debate and it gets a little ugly. They disagree about whether this can be from God, right in front of our friend. "If Jesus healed you on the

Sabbath, he must be a sinner and a sinner cannot heal you! So, who do you think Jesus really is?"

**Our hero has been blind all his life.** He is experiencing sight for the first time. But, those with sight who are dressed much better than he is, and seem to have positions of authority, are not as pleased about this as he thought they would be. And, they are asking for his opinion. "Who do you think Jesus really is?" The blind man, who had been blind, just wants to get away from these guys. So, he thinks about it and proclaims, "He is a Prophet!". That did not go over well.

So, for the second time, the parents are brought into the discussion. We know Jesus cleared them of any responsibility of their son being born blind, but the Pharisees now question if their son was ever blind at all! Once the parents arrive, they ask them, "Is this your son, **who you say was born blind?**" (They infer the parents may have been mistaken all these years.) "How then does he now see?"

I imagine a long pause here. They certainly did not want any issues with the Pharisees and they also know their son has always been blind. So, their answer is beautiful. "Well, we know that this is our son, (OK) and that he was born blind: (good job so far) but, we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age." Great answer! They give each other a high five and shuffle out of there. Their membership remains intact and they can breathe again. Of course they have thrown their son under the proverbial chariot!

But the Pharisees were not happy. They call the man "who had been blind" back in. They tell him to give God the glory and that Jesus is a sinner. Please remember, this young man has been sitting on a sidewalk begging his entire life. He is not educated. He is most likely dirty and just came in from washing mud out of his eyes. **How would you answer the Pharisees question if you were the healed blind man?**

Listen to the young man's words. "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." Wow – grand slam home run!!!

Can you imagine the looks he got!! But they must ask one more time. "How did he open your eyes?"

**I bet those beautiful eyes were rolling in that young man's head, maybe for the first time in his life!**

The young man had had enough and for the next seven verses, he gives them a theology lesson that has been passed down to all of us for over 2000 years! Folks remember these powerful words from this young man, especially when you feel you cannot answer those who question your faith in God.

**“<sup>30</sup> The man answered, “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. <sup>31</sup> We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. <sup>32</sup> Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. <sup>33</sup> If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”**

They throw him out.

Jesus finds the young man and reveals to him who he is, and the young man responds with two beautiful words, “I believe.”

I know what is happening in this world right now and each of us may be going through some very rough times. I know we did not see this coming and can't see what is coming next. But the same God who makes the blind see and empowers them to be bold in His name has never let you out of his sight. His love, forgiveness, grace, strength and power all wrap around us and protect us.

This week remember how I think this young man rolled his eyes at those who would question the God you love and continues to love you. Remember the “sight” he has given each of us to see what he has accomplished in our lives and the life of our parish and neighborhood.

Remember – that young blind man. He went, he washed, he opened his eyes.

Deacon Carl