

The Fourth Sunday of Lent

March 26, 2017

One of the singular characteristics of the Gospel of John is that we often find stories that you won't find in Matthew, Mark or Luke.

Another unique aspect of John is that he stresses only seven miracles. And he doesn't call them miracles; he calls them "signs".

And each of these signs are intentional in the way they highlight an important aspect of Jesus' mission. The healing presented to us in today's liturgy is there to teach us that besides our ordinary sight there is another kind of *spiritual* sight that allows us to see the truth of who Jesus is.

This story also focuses on the contrast between light and darkness. The man had lived in darkness all his life but through healing he comes into the light in two senses: literally, since his sight was restored; and spiritually, since he was given the gift of faith.

After the healing there's a series of questions that also shows a contrast between the skepticism of the Pharisees while the faith of the blind man develops and strengthens.

We want to notice too the similarities between last week's Gospel of the woman at the well and the blind man in order to compare how each of these people progress in their understanding of Jesus.

First the man claims that Jesus is a prophet, and then he states that he is from God and finally when faced with Jesus once more he declares his faith in him as the Son of Man and kneels down and worships him.

And even though the man was born blind, there's certainly nothing wrong with his voice. He's extremely articulate in his speech and, despite a presumed lack of education, he's clever and brave enough to stand up to the supposedly superior Pharisees as he exposes their

plan to entrap Jesus.

Nowhere else in the Gospels do you read of a poor person speaking to those in authority in the way that this blind man does. It's clear to him that Jesus is good and truthful and that these supposedly religious men are nothing but hypocrites. They pretend to look for the truth but when he gives it to them they can't accept it.

Despite his boldness towards the Pharisees our hero is revealed to be quite humble in his self-knowledge. Three times he confesses his ignorance: once to the people, once to the Pharisees and finally once to Jesus. And a profession of faith follows each of these confessions of ignorance. (Peter's three confessions. John loves the numbers 3 & 7)

John's message here is that it's only when we honestly admit our ignorance that faith can find its way into our lives.

Then after being driven away by the Pharisees the blind man eventually encounters Jesus once again. Jesus who seeks asks him if he believes in the Son of Man. The blind man says, 'Tell me who he is so that I may believe in him.' Jesus replies, 'You are looking at him.'

Notice the wonderful way John uses the senses in this brief but significant exchange. This man who has been blind all his life and who has had to rely heavily on speech and hearing says, 'Tell me who he is.'

Jesus invites him to use his new found sight by saying, 'You are looking at him.'

The early church loved this story. It was often depicted in the paintings on the walls of the Catacombs and the three-fold interrogation was taken up and used in the Baptismal Liturgy where adults were put through three scrutinies very much as we will do this morning [will do with our elect tomorrow, did this morning].

John uses his love for contrast by demonstrating how light triumphs over darkness, truth over untruth, and faith over disbelief. This story also helps us to see that while physical

blindness is certainly a terrible affliction spiritual blindness can be much worse.

We often speak of sight and insight. We see by ordinary physical sight the things around us. But with insight we see on a different level, we come to a realization, we make connections that aren't immediately noticeable. There's a moment when the real truth of something dawns on us, the moment of insight. The "A-ha" moment.

But if we go one-step deeper even than *ordinary* insight we recognize that moment of coming to faith.

It's the moment when we realize that God exists, that he's the author and sustainer of all creation, and that Jesus is his Son and our Savior.

And then the only appropriate thing for us to in the face of this realization is to do just what that blind man did: kneel down and worship him.

Finally, our first reading from first Samuel teaches us that God's reality and our human perception of things don't necessarily match. Neither Jesse nor Samuel the prophet thought that the future king of Israel would be the most insignificant of Jesse's sons.

And no one expected the Messiah to be a carpenter from Nazareth. When we focus on our perceptions of what God *should* be like or how he *should* act, we run the risk of missing his presence in our lives. Even in times of sickness, we expect God to heal us, when our sickness might be the very way that we draw closer to him.

As we enter into the second half of Lent, may we pray for the grace to take whatever steps are necessary to move our spiritual sight from darkness into light.