

## FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

### John 9:1-42

Our Scripture passage for this for this Sunday comes from the Gospel of John 9:1-42. It is a rich scene in which Jesus gives both sight and insight to the man born blind. This reading tells us who Jesus is and what He means for our lives. At the same time, this particular reading is a teaching on the nature of sin and the challenge of discipleship. Here are several points for our reflection and prayer.

The passage begins with some interesting details that give us a key with which to understand the whole scene. For example, it tells us that the man was blind from birth. Actually the Greek text says that he was blind from his "genesis". That has a double meaning of both birth and creation. By using this term, John is telling us that Jesus is not someone who comes to simply restore things to the way they once were (that is, to return the world as it was before the Fall). Rather, Jesus comes to establish a new creation, a new Genesis, and He does it through touching the man's eyes with mud and having him wash in the waters of Siloam, which means the "Sent One". These are all images of the Sacrament of Baptism. You see, in baptism we become a new creation in Christ Jesus. Just as Adam was formed from the dust of the earth and infused with the Spirit of God (Gn 2:7), so now Jesus takes the dust of the earth and infuses it with Himself (symbolized by spittle). He then applies this remedy for blindness to the man's eyes for his healing. The word for healing in Greek is the same word for "salvation". What the Lord is offering this man is not only the healing of his blindness but also the gift of salvation by uniting him with God in Jesus. However, the man must cooperate with God's grace and follow Jesus' invitation by going and washing in the pool of Siloam. John tells us that Siloam means "Sent", and throughout John's Gospel Jesus states that He is the "Sent One" of God. Thus, to wash in the pool of the "Sent One" is to wash in the water that is Jesus Christ Himself. Wow! The man born blind represents all of us who are naturally born unable to see God and the world clearly, and who need to be re-created in the waters of Jesus (baptism) so as to receive the healing, saving gift of Himself. That new creation is not the goal of a Christian life; it is really just the beginning. What a beginning it is!

1. *How does this passage change the way you understand baptism?*
2. *How can a faith community help people to better appreciate the significance of their baptism, especially if they were baptized as children?*
3. *When a person is baptized, they are given a lit candle with the words, "Receive the Light of Christ." When have you experienced Jesus opening your eyes in a moment of faith? To be immersed in the "Sent One" means that we share in the life of God and that the life of God permeates and defines us in every way. When are you most aware of the life of God in you?*
4. *How can you foster greater awareness of, and responsiveness to, the life of God in you?*
5. *How is it possible/or us to allow the life of God to become diminished within us?*

In this passage, Jesus offers an important self-revelation when He says, "I AM the Light of the World". This is not only a statement of who Jesus is but also of what Jesus does for disciples. The image of light is important, especially for one who is born blind. With sight and light, a person can begin to see clearly. Jesus gives us the ability to spiritually

"see" in the waters of baptism, but we still need to be illumined (light) in order to correctly use the gift of sight and see clearly. By identifying Himself as the Light of the World, Jesus is stating that He is the one who illumines our lives and helps us see the world from God's perspective. Through His life, death, and resurrection, as well as His teachings and ministry, Jesus is shedding light on our human experience and helping us see the world as God sees it. The gift of our baptism, then, may open our eyes and give us the capacity for faith, but we still need to become informed and mature by following the Light of the World and allowing the Lord's teachings to both help us interpret the events of our times and guide our response to those events. This illumination does not happen in a vacuum or just in the privacy of our individual prayer. Rather, the ongoing mission of the Church is twofold. First, it involves teaching disciples how to see the world from a Christian perspective. Second, it calls the Church to be the instrument by which Jesus sheds His light on our human situation. This mission is not only entrusted to those in official positions of ministry responsibility. All Christians, by virtue of their baptism, are to be active members of the Body of Christ by illuminating the human situation with the Light of Christ. This transition from darkness to light was described by Saint Gregory of Nyssa as the intelligence's yearning for understanding by which it gains access to the invisible and the incomprehensible, leaving behind what has been observed, in order to see God in His simplicity.

1. *How do you seek the Light of Christ in your life?*
2. *What situation do you need to see from God's perspective now?*
3. *What situations in our society or larger world need to be illumined with the Light of Christ?*
4. *What ministries have most helped you mature in your faith?*
5. *Who do you know whose eyes have been opened in baptism but still need to experience the light of Christ so that their situation can be illumined through your word and example?*
6. *What are the obstacles that can obstruct the Church from becoming fully the effective instrument of God as the Light of the World?*
7. *When was the light of Christ turned on/or you?*

Jesus also tells us that He must do the work of God while it is day (Jn 9:4). There are two meanings to that statement. On the one hand, the work of God is first and foremost to bring people the gift of faith ("so that the world may believe" Jn 17:21). However, faith requires that we recognize and acknowledge God present and acting in the person of Jesus. Thus, the works of Jesus, such as miracles, are ultimately meant to accomplish the one great work for which Jesus was sent (so that the world might believe). When we make the connection between an action of God in our lives and the presence of God in Jesus, then we have "seen the light" and can profess our faith in Jesus not just as a great man, or miracle worker, or prophet, or Messiah, or Son of Man, but as the very presence of God in our midst. That process of deepened faith confession is seen in the blind man's growing awareness in this passage. He slowly comes to believe in who Jesus really is because of the miracle Jesus performed. Jesus wants us to see the light of God's presence in our lives as well. Sometimes we are happy to experience the works of God, such as blessings, miracles, healings, but fail to follow through on the true work God wants to accomplish in us

through those individual works: deepened faith in and commitment to Jesus as the one in whom God is present and through whom God acts.

1. *What have been some of the works of God in your life?*
2. *When has a work of God led you to deeper faith, and how did you express that deeper faith?*
3. *How can a faith community help people correctly recognize the works of God in their lives and translate that awareness into deepened faith?*

The man born blind had to grow in his faith and understanding of who healed him. This growth did not happen in a pleasant and peaceful way. Rather, his growth in faith occurred because of the questions and challenges he faced. He grew in faith because he had the courage to stand up and face those challenges. He acknowledged what he did not know while at the same time standing firm with what he did know. Through this process of being challenged and questioned by others, he actually learned about Jesus and became a strong disciple. That can be an important lesson for us as well. You see, being a disciple doesn't necessarily make our lives easier. It oftentimes means that we are called to take a stand of faith and defend Jesus in our conversations as well—especially when we are challenged or questioned. Rather than seeing those moments as awkward situations from which we should shy away, we should see them as opportunities to witness to the Lord's presence and action in our lives and through that witness to grow in our discipleship. God's action in our lives doesn't necessarily make life easier; being a disciple can actually make life more difficult. Some people are angry, outraged, disappointed, shocked, or dismayed when we respond to the Lord as a committed disciple. Certainly that was true of the man born blind. Still, he remained firm in his faith.

When have you been questioned about your faith? What did you do?

St Paul said, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil 4:13). Who are people you know who have actually become stronger in faith because of the challenges and questions they have faced?

Who are people who have actually become weaker in faith because of challenges and questions they have faced?

What makes the difference between someone who is strengthened or someone who is weakened by challenges and questions?

What can a faith community do to help its members grow in their faith when they face questions or challenges?

Lastly, this passage is permeated with statements, questions, and presumptions about the nature of sin. At first, the disciples question whose sin caused the man to be born blind. That question reveals an understanding of sin that is primarily based on moral actions (either those of the man born blind or his parents). For the Jewish leaders, they based their understanding of sin on observance of the Mosaic Law. For this reason, they called Jesus a sinner because He healed on the Sabbath in violation of the Law of Moses. The Lord uses this scene as an opportunity to teach us a far more profound understanding of sin: one that is not based just on actions or observance of Law, but one that is based on our acceptance of the gift of God in Jesus. Sin, in John's Gospel, is when a person rejects relationship (faith) with God in Jesus. In John's Gospel, Jesus did not come to condemn the world but rather so that the world might have life (Jn 3:17, 12:47). Since our Lord did

not come to bring judgment, that means we judge (and condemn) ourselves based on our decision to accept the Light of the World in Jesus or to reject Him and choose to remain in darkness and sin. Sin, then, is fundamentally our turning away from the life of God offered to us in Jesus.

1. *How does this radical understanding of sin in John's Gospel challenge you?*
2. *How is it that good people can find themselves turning away from deeper relationship with Jesus without realizing it?*
3. *In the Gospel of John, Jesus is offering us an opportunity to live in relationship with him in each moment. When we say "Yes" to that invitation, we are accepting His Light; when we say "No" to that invitation, we are choosing darkness and sin. How can you prepare yourself to live your day as a "Yes" to God?*