

**Spiritual Awakening**  
**As Christians Discovering Who We Really Are!**  
**By Temptations in The Desert or By Opposition in Our Streets**

**We have seen already that we need to fight, not fear our temptations.** The more we resist, the stronger we emerge.

In this miracle-story we can learn another important lesson. It is **not despite** our challenges but often **because of our challenges** that we can emerge stronger and finer in our Faith.

**This can be heartening** for us in a time when we are often confronted by others, even friends and family, for practicing our faith, for going to Mass, for trying to lead upright lives.

THE MORE I RE-READ the story of the Blind Man gaining his sight, the more I am encouraged on my own spiritual journey.

Confrontation can actually **deepen our faith, not weaken it.** It can reveal the true depth of our **religious commitment.**

**Let us now look a little deeper** at some of the key moments in the blind man's spiritual awakening: an awakening nurtured **by the opposition around him.**

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**The neighbors react to the healed man.** (John 9:8-12)

"His neighbors and those who had seen him earlier as a beggar said, **"Isn't this the one who used to sit and beg?"** Some said, **"It is,"** but others said, "No, he just looks like him." He said, **"I am."**

The **transformation** in the life of the once blind beggar was powerful and inspiring but **also challenging**. A blind man who used **to sit and beg** for scraps to survive **now stands** with an air of confidence about him. When people doubted that he was the same person, **he stated publicly: "I am"**.

Like the faithful Christians in the Russian church, he stood his ground no matter **the consequences**.

**LESSON:**

- **Has our encounter** with Jesus Christ **transformed our lives in any noticeable way?**
- **When questioned** about our Christianity identity, **do we take a confident stand or a timid backseat?**

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**"So, they said to him,** "How were your eyes opened?" He replied, **"The man called Jesus** made clay and anointed my eyes and told me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' So, I went there and washed and was able to see." And they said to him, **"Where is he?"** He said, **"I don't know."**

**The man called Jesus:** At this point, the man knew very little about Jesus. **He didn't know that Jesus was from Nazareth, or was the Messiah, or claimed to be the Son of God, or the light of the world.**

The man only knew **Jesus by name** and **that this man had healed him.**

**He** has only a superficial knowledge of Jesus but he knows it. This is so reassuring for me.

**Lesson:** “**Many of us may not be able** to put into **theologically** correct language **our understanding** of Jesus Christ. But in spite of that, **we can witness to what Jesus has done for us in our own lives.**”

Even when people cannot understand with their intellect, they can still feel a stirring within their hearts.

**It is better to love Jesus than to love theories about him.”<sup>1</sup>**

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When asked, “**Where is he?**” the beggar said, “**I don't know.**”

I love the **honest humility** of the statement: “**I don't know.**”

**Lesson:** Many people cannot admit that they do not have all the answers.

I once heard the following about an arrogant man: “**He might be wrong but he is never in doubt.**”

**So how can anyone, including God,** communicate with that type of person who is already full of himself.

**Such a person's ear, eyes and heart are all locked, closed tightly!**

**While this man was blind, his heart was wide open.** Jesus went to him, anointed him and then sent him. And he then went and washed as instructed. Remember the man had not even seen the face of Jesus. He had only heard his voice and felt his hand.

**Lesson: Jesus can be right beside us but we are not always conscious of it. We do not recognize or seemly do not need to recognize his presence fully. All we need to do is to trust him.**

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**The healed man is brought to the Pharisees. (John 9:13-16a)**

“... **So, then the Pharisees also asked him** how he was able to see. He said to them, “He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and now I can see.” So, some of the Pharisees said, “**This man is not from God, because he does not keep the Sabbath.**””

**Why did Jesus** make the clay and opened his eyes **on the Sabbath?**

Did Jesus cure on the Sabbath so as to challenge the petty traditions of the religious leaders, traditions that they elevated to the place of binding laws?

To the Pharisees, Jesus could not be from God because **He did not line up with their traditions and prejudices. God made us in His image. But many people now want to make God into their image!**

“The Pharisees are typical of the people in every generation who condemn anyone whose idea of religion is not theirs.”<sup>2</sup>

**Lesson:**

- **Is Jesus challenging** people to examine some of their religious beliefs; **beliefs that may be theirs only and not His?**
- **Do we select only religious** truths that suit ourselves and our opinions?

- Or do our Christian truths transform us and our attitudes to other people, different from us?

Just after writing the above line (on October 1, 2019), I went to our little chapel to say morning prayer. I was amazed, moved to tears, to find the following line:

*“Indeed, I tell you that, unless you undergo a change of heart..... you will not enter my heavenly kingdom.”*

**If we do undergo that change of heart**, there may be a personal price to pay: the pain of division.

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““But others said, “How can a sinful man do such signs?” **And there was a division among them.**””

I think none of us like division and yet **Jesus has predicted it even for his followers.**

“... Do you think that I have come **to establish peace** on the earth? No, I tell you, **but rather division.** From now on a household of five will be divided, three against two and two against three; .....” Luke 12:49-53

**Lesson: Have we encountered disagreement** in our own homes or workplaces because of opposition to our Christian beliefs? If so, it may be because we are true followers of Jesus.

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**He is a prophet.** (John 9:17)

“So, they said to the blind man again, “What do you have to say about him, since he opened your eyes?” He said, “**He is a prophet.**”” (John 9:17)

**Recall that at the time of the miracle** the man only knew Jesus' name.

“At the beginning of this scene, the man who was formerly blind **might be characterized as having the experience but missing the meaning.**

When questioned, he just gives the observable sequence of events: **clay, washed, see.**

**But the Pharisees continue to grill him,** and their questions move him beyond a surface appreciation of what happened. He comes to understand that it is not **just a man called Jesus but a prophet** who has opened his eyes.

He is following the visible sign into its invisible foundation.

**It is ironic that, as the Pharisees flounder in the darkness, they are unwittingly helping the man who was formerly blind move toward the light.”<sup>3</sup>**

**Lesson: By standing up for our Christian Faith,** our spirituality will be deepened, not weakened. Opposition can help us to appreciate our Christian values all the more.

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**The healed man is tempted, challenged, interrogated by the Pharisees but he holds his own, resulting in his expulsion.** (John 9:24-34)

“**So, they again called the man who was blind,** and said to him, "Give God the glory! We know that this Man is a sinner.””

He answered and said, "Whether He is a sinner or not I do not know. **One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see. "**

The Pharisees take their stand on their preconceived, prejudiced and judgmental ideas. But the man with, new sight, **takes his stand on the simple facts that he knows: I was blind, now I see.**

**Lesson: “Relying on what we personally experience** with Jesus is about the only way to deal with people who are so prejudiced. No one can effectively argue against **“though I was blind, now I see.”**<sup>4</sup>

We too can only talk, with confidence, about our own spiritual experience.

By the same token, we **cannot dismiss** the experiences of another person as being less important than ours!

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INNOCENTLY UNAWARE of the prejudices held against him, a poor old man, staunchly religious, some years ago applied for membership in an exclusive church.

**The pastor attempted to put him off** with all sorts of evasive remarks. The old man, **becoming aware that he was not wanted**, said finally that he would pray on it and perhaps the Lord would tell him just what to do.

Several days later he returned. **“Well,”** asked the minister, **“did the Lord send you a message?”**

“Yes sir, he did,” was the answer, “He told me it wasn’t any use.

**“What, the Lord said it was not use!”** smiled a relied minister.

The Lord said, **“Son, it is no use, I’ve been trying to get in that same church myself for ten years, and I still can’t make it.”**”

**And they cast him out.** (John 9:32 -34)

“Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind. **If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing.**” They answered and said to him, "You were completely born in sins, and are you teaching us?" **And they cast him out.**”

**Interestingly, that is what the Pharisees did to Jesus too** after his very first proclamation. When he said: **“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.”**

He has sent me to proclaim...recovery of sight to the blind.:

On hearing this **“They rose up, drove him out of the town,** and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town had been built, to hurl him down headlong. But he passed through the midst of them and went away. (Luke 4:29-30)

**Lesson: Being "put out" of any society** is undeniably painful. But it can also be liberating. “It is better to walk alone than with a crowd going in the wrong direction.” (sign at a bus stop in Laughlin, NV)

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**The healed man believes in Jesus.** (John 9:35-38)

The final steps in his spiritual journey

**“Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him,**

**Jesus found him!**



**So where was Jesus during the man's ordeal?** How did the man feel? Abandoned so quickly to face the opposition and abuse alone?

**Have you ever felt abandoned on your spiritual journey? I have!**

IN SEPTEMBER 1974, I left home to start my studies for the priesthood.

During that Spiritual Year with the St. Patrick Fathers, we were not allowed home at all. And yet it was one the happiest years of my life. I could feel the presence of God in so many places and at so many times, but especially at Mass.

After that spiritual year, we went to Cork city, where I studied at the University. **But something changed there**, maybe because of a family tragedy! **I began to enter into a darkness, a loneliness.**

I could no longer feel the presence of God in my life even during Mass. All I could feel was an emptiness, a deepening emptiness.

I once summed up my feelings as: "when in the company of friends, a joke gets from me only a troubled smile."

After two years of struggling I decided to leave the seminary. I moved into an apartment. **Although, I felt that God has abandoned me, I did not abandon him.** I remember still searching for a Catholic church. I continued to attend Mass every weekend.

After, graduating from University, I got a teaching post in a girls' Catholic High School. My degree was in mathematics but I was asked to also teach religion. **I did not jump at the idea because God had abandoned me. However, I did need a job!!**

DURING THE FIRST WEEK, some of the girls in my religion class actually stuck their tongues out at me. I had not expected opposition from 16 years-old girls in a Catholic school. But, I persevered, getting them involved in helping girls their age in Turkana, a desert area on Kenya.

**Then I began to notice a change in them.** For some reason, I shared some of my story with them. And they did the same for me.

**After a few months, my religious classes became so important to me that I disliked the weekends, well in ways!**

It was during that year, I decided to return to my studies for the priesthood.

**Why did I return?** God came visible again in my life through these young students, **their opposition, their trick questions and finally through their openness to see God in their lives.** (Since then I have blessed some of their marriages.)

When I returned to the seminary, I did so in a different frame of mind, in a very New Light. I came to see that Jesus had not abandoned me, **no more than parents abandon their child, learning to take his or her first few steps!**

God was training me! I now believed in the Presence of the Son of God in a deeper way: **always near but not always seen!**

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“When He had found him, He said to him, **“Do you believe in the Son of God?”** He answered and said, **“Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?”** Jesus said to him, **“You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you”.**

Then he said, **“Lord, I believe!”** And he worshiped Him.

**His journey is complete!**

**And hopefully our New Journey is now started with New Sight.**

I will leave you with another prayer from that morning on October 1, 2019.

In the tender compassion of our God  
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,  
to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death,  
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

- 1 William Barclay Study Light
- 2 William Barclay Study Light
- 3 Pages 133 & 134 On Earth as It Is in Heaven
- 5. William Barclay Study Light