

Talk 3. JESUS GIVES SIGHT TO A MAN BORN BLIND
Spiritual Awakening and Transformation

“Neither he nor his parents sinned; it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him.”

IN MAY 2010, A FRIEND of mine was hospitalized with Pancreatitis, an inflammation in the pancreas. It is a very serious illness. The following Christmas, I was home in Ireland. On Christmas Eve, I said Mass in my local Church. **On Christmas morning, I called to John’s home to say Mass with John and his family.** As John’s recovery was slow, that became the tradition for many years.

Each year, I could see not only a physical **improvement but also a change, spiritually.** About the third Christmas, after Mass, John walked me to the car. It was a lovely crisp morning. John, distracted by a robin, just said to me: “It is amazing how people cannot see God in the beauty of nature. I suppose I did not see it myself until lately!”

Jesus said in his first public address, quoting Isaiah:

"The spirit of the Lord is upon me.

He has sent me to bring good news to the poor,

to proclaim liberty to captives, **recovery of sight to the blind."** (Isaiah 11)

In today’s Gospel, Jesus opens a blind man’s physical eyes that leads to a Spiritual Awakening.

“**Antonio Machado**, the Spanish poet, once said that **all of Christ’s words** could be summed up in “**wake up!**”¹

Wake up, **become aware, conscious of God** all around us and within us.

Staying awake is one of the most **regular requests** of Jesus.

“**Stay awake with me.**” (Matthew 26:38), “**So you could not keep watch with me for one hour**” (Matthew 26:41).

EVERY MORNING, each of us has to physically wake up.

Spiritually too, people may be **asleep** and they have to wake up, **lost** and they have to be found, **blind** and they have to see, **deaf** and they have to hear, **dead** and they have to rise to life.

“These images, **taken from physical life**, point to the **changes of consciousness and action** that are necessary to respond to **Jesus**.

When both John the Baptist and Jesus cry out “**Change your mind, the Kingdom of God is near**” (cf. Matt 3:2) they stress the need for **a different level of perception in order to respond to the spiritual dimension of life characterized as God's Kingdom.**”²

“This condition of being asleep, blind, deaf, lost, and dead refers to **spiritual ignorance**. **Spiritual ignorance means the spiritual dimension of life simply does not enter into consciousness.**

FOR EXAMPLE, when the disciples on the road to Emmaus interpret Jesus' life and death only in human terms, **the risen but unrecognized Christ** says in frustration, "Oh, how foolish you are . . . !" (Luke 24:25).

It is simply lack of attention to the spiritual as a whole.”³

“Their physical senses are fine; they see and hear. But their ability to **understand with their heart**, the spiritual center of their being, **is underdeveloped**. The result is that they will not turn for healing.

They will not be made whole by the inclusion of the spiritual into their self-understanding.”⁴

Even the disciples in today’s Gospel were blinded by their own false beliefs.

Now as Jesus passed by, he saw a man who was blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, **“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”**

Have you ever seen on the news a photo or a video showing a person in dire need, struggling to survive? Recently I came upon the following news heading:

“A New York student was fatally stabbed while onlookers took a video of his suffering”, By Madeleine Thompson,
Updated 2:32 AM ET, Thu September 19, 2019”

My reaction was “What were those onlookers thinking of? A good video!!! **Why did they not drop the phone and run to help that person?**

“Rabbi, who sinned..?” To me this is a shocking cold-hearted question. **The disciples of Jesus** showed no interest in helping the man.

They were only interested in discussing the cause for his condition as if it was an unsolved riddle.

Jesus did not dwell on the theological puzzle, but on actually curing the man in need of help. **“It is ours, not to speculate,** but to perform acts of mercy and love, according to the tenor of the gospel. **Let us then be less inquisitive and more practical...”** ⁵

(Spurgeon)

What blinded the disciples of Jesus?

Their belief at that time, was that God rewards good people and punishes evil people. Therefore, if a person was rich, that was his or her repayment for a good life.

However, if someone was ill, that condition was seen as a penance for his or her sins or the sins of their parents. **This false belief caused the rejection of the sick, the needy in their society.** So not only had the sick person to contend with his or her illness but also with their rejection as sinners.

Religious people added salt to an already open wound! How tragic!

Jesus rejects, contradicts these misguided beliefs. He gives a **spiritual meaning to his blindness.** **“Neither he nor his parents sinned; it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him.”**

Jesus is here to do the work of God in curing such physical, mental and spiritual anguish.

Does the belief still linger that sickness is God punishing us for past sins? Sadly, as a priest, I must admit that I encounter that belief too often. **A sick or grieving person beats himself or herself up for something that they did in the past.**

The mother of the man born blind and his poor man himself, surely wondered who sinned?

Rabbi Harold S. Kushner wrote a book called, “When Bad Things Happen to Good People.” That is a very thought-provoking title: **“When Bad Things Happen to Good People.”**

“Why did God allow this to happen?” This is a question, a plea, a scream we all face from time to time. As a nineteen-year-old seminarian. I asked that question when my father was killed in a farm accident!

“Why did God allow this to happen?” I do not have the answer to that question. I can only cling to the hope that God did not cause the tragedy **but that He will at least do “Damage Control.”**

I do remember the night of our tragedy saying to myself: **“Father, I will continue on the road to priesthood.”**

“Rabbi, who sinned?” Jesus pointed the question away from **why** and on to the idea, **what can God do in this situation?”** ⁶

WE SEE THE SAME TEACHING when Jesus is told that his friend Lazarus is very ill. On hearing of Lazarus’ sickness Jesus said: **“This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”** John 11:4

It is very important to note that God did not cause the man to be born blind in order that, later his glory should be revealed in his miracle, namely the removal of the blindness.

We saw in Jesus' resistance to Satan's temptation to jump off the roof of the temple that **Jesus did not want to be seen as a mere wonder-worker.**

To me, in curing the blind man, we see that Jesus took the situation, **sad situation that was presented to him.** He did not make judgements or (take videos). **He took action.** As a result, when this person, as a grown man gained physical sight for the first time, he also gained Spiritual Insight.

It was a Spiritual Awakening! Over a series of steps that followed his cure, he recognized more and more Jesus as the Son of God. **Most,** if not all, of the people at the scene failed to do this, although they were not physically blind.

The Means of the Cure – Using Saliva

JESUS SPAT ON THE GROUND and made clay with the saliva; and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay. And He said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which is translated, Sent). So, he went and washed, and came back seeing.

Jesus spat ... and He anointed the eyes: It is important to note that in this miracle, **Jesus took the initiative.** Unlike Bartimeaus in another miracle, **this blind man did not come to Jesus** and ask to be healed.

In fact, He did not know who Jesus was at this stage.

It is often mentioned that the man was **born blind.** That is important. It would seem that this man may have been a gentile, a non-Jew, one of us.

Jesus went to him, anointed him and then **expected the blind man to respond in faith: Go, wash in the pool of Siloam.**

In His ministry, **Jesus did not adopt just one approach.** He dealt with each person as their own particular need required.

Most people, I imagine, **would cringe** at the thoughts of using saliva and mud as a medicine upon the eyes. However, that was not so strange in the ancient world. Saliva, **particularly of some celebrated people**, was thought to have medicinal qualities.

What is very important here is the **emphasis of John places on the utter compassion of Jesus**. The touch of his friendly hand must have been reassuring to a person who was shunned by this society as a sinner.

Also, the very weight of the clay would assure the blind man that something had indeed been done to him. And of course, it would be an **encouragement** to do as Jesus told him. **“Go, wash in the pool of Siloam.”**

Up to this point Jesus had taken the lead. Now he expected the blind man to do his part with faith-filled action. The healing process **would not happen** unless the blind man responded by going to the pool.

So, he went and washed: **This took faith!** I wonder does the expression **“blind faith”** come from this person’s faith? Jesus had not promised the blind man sight by going to wash.

The blind man then had to find his way to the pool of Siloam and down its steps to the pool itself. He likely could think of a dozen reasons why this was a fool’s errand, but he went and washed in faith and obedience, because Jesus told him to and also **because there was mud in his eyes**.

So, he went and washed, and came back seeing: This was an utterly unique and very significant sign in the Scriptures. **From Genesis to John, no prophet, priest, or**

apostle ever gave sight to blind eyes. But Jesus gave sight to blind eyes on a number of occasions. And that was or should have been **very significant to all who witnessed this miracle**, especially the Jewish leaders!

Opening the eyes of the blind was prophesied to be a work of the Messiah:

“The Lord opens the eyes of the blind.” (Psalm 146:8)

The eyes of the blind shall be opened. (Isaiah 35:5)

"The spirit of the Lord is upon me.

He has sent me to bring good news to the poor,

to proclaim liberty to captives, **recovery of sight to the blind."**

Since healing blind eyes is the work of the Lord, then there can be no doubt: Jesus is the Beloved Son of God the Father.

The fallout from this cure:

In this long account, (so long that I am breaking it over two days) **the actual cure on the blind man is almost glossed over.**

It is the consequences of curing a person seen as a sinner and on the Sabbath, **that is examined, discussed and argued over.**

I find this so encouraging for us in a time when we are often confronted by others for practicing our own faith. I believe that confrontation can actually deepen our faith, not weaken it.

ONE OF MY BEST FRIENDS IN CHICAGO is a young man called **Remas**. His family has a Dollar Store. He is a committed Muslim and I a Catholic priest. An unusual combination! We often share our beliefs. I was amazed to learn that we have so much in common. **He too believes in One God, in Mary and in Jesus.** But then the differences emerged. He believes in Jesus as one of their prophets, who did not die but was taken up to heaven.

One Friday I was in store when Remas' father joined the discussion. He challenged me about our belief in the Passion, and Death of Jesus. He told me that he loves his son Remas. **As a father**, he would die for his son. So how could God, the Father, demanded the death of His Own Son, Jesus.

I was not expecting this question! I just wanted to buy a bar of soap!

But, then I turned to Remas and asked him if he loved his Father. "Yes"

"Would you give up your life for your father?" "Yes, of course!" "Well that is what we believe! Jesus, the Son of God gave us His life to save each of us!"

It was only after this discussion that I reflected on the death of Jesus Christ in a new light. **Without the death of Jesus**, we would **not have** the Resurrection, which is really the foundation of our Christian Belief.

So, this brief discussion, **confrontation, deepened my understanding of the death and resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ.**

That is what happens in the confrontation of the man who had been blind but could now see physically. He now begins to see things in a much deeper way, in a spiritual way.

The nit-picking of the small-minded pharisees blinded themselves but at the same time led the cured man to a deeper understanding of **WHO ACTUALLY CURED HIM.**

“Neither he nor his parents sinned; **it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him.**”

As Christians, the way we deal with suffering, illness and death, can be the most powerful witness in today’s secular world.

God’s Presence in our lives gives us New Sight.

I will end with one of my favorite reflections on suffering:

My life is but a weaving

Between my God and me.

I cannot choose the colors

He weaveth steadily.

Of times He weaveth sorrow;

And I in foolish pride

Forget He sees the upper

And I the underside.

Not ‘til the loom is silent

And the shuttles cease to fly

Will God unroll the canvas

And reveal the reason why.

The dark threads are as needful

In the weaver’s skillful hand

As the threads of gold and silver

In the pattern He has planned.

He knows, He loves, He cares;

Nothing this truth can dim.

He gives the very best to those

Who leave the choice to Him.

Tomorrow we will look at how confrontation helped this man who was once blind to see:

- A man called Jesus (John 9:11)
- He is a prophet (John 9:17)
- A man from God (John 9:33)
- The Son of God, worthy of worship (John 9:38)

And how confrontation can help us too.

We see the same lack of understanding later in the attacks of the Pharisees, the religious leaders, **spiritually blind** religious leaders. **When leads to confrontation with the once blind man and amazingly then to his insight.**

¹ Paraphrase of "First Sunday of Lent "ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN" by John Shea page 6

² First Sunday of Lent "ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN" by John Shea page 6

³ First Sunday of Lent "ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN" by John Shea page 7

⁴ First Sunday of Lent "ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN" by John Shea page 7 & 8

⁵ JOHN 9 – JESUS GIVES SIGHT TO A MAN BORN BLIND <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/john-9/>

⁶ JOHN 9 – JESUS GIVES SIGHT TO A MAN BORN BLIND <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/john-9/>

Introduction to Mass

Jessica LaGrone in her book called **“Inside the Miracles of Jesus”**, writes: **“You and I are going to have good days and bad days, but remember, too, that we are people of the cross. And because of the cross of Jesus, because of the desperation that overcame death, our worst day actually becomes our best”**;9 (Page 121)