

Lectio Divina
Fourth Sunday in Lent
22 March 2020



A blind man sees the light
Our eyes open when we live with Jesus
John 9:1-41

1. Opening prayer

Lord Jesus, send your Spirit to help us to read the Scriptures with the same mind that you read them to the disciples on the way to Emmaus. In the light of the Word, written in the Bible, you helped them to discover the presence of God in the disturbing events of your sentence and death. Thus, the cross that seemed to be the end of all hope became for them the source of life and of resurrection.

Create silence in us so that we may listen to your voice in Creation and in the Scriptures, in events and in people, above all in the poor and suffering. May your word guide us so that we too, like the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, may experience the force of your resurrection and witness to others that you are alive in our midst as source of fraternity, justice and peace. We ask this of you, Jesus, son of Mary, who revealed the Father to us and sent us your Spirit. Amen.

2. Reading

a) A key to the reading:

The text of the Gospel of the fourth Sunday of Lent invites us to meditate on the healing of a man born blind. It is a short but lively text. It is a concrete example of the way the Fourth Gospel reveals the deep hidden meaning of the events in Jesus' life. The story of the healing of the blind man helps us open our eyes to the picture of Jesus that we each carry within ourselves. We often think of a Jesus who looks like a glorious king, removed from the life of ordinary people! In the Gospels, Jesus is presented as a Servant of the poor, friend of sinners. The picture of the Messiah-King that the Pharisees had in mind, kept us from recognizing Jesus the Messiah-Servant. As we read the Gospel, let us try to pay attention to two things: (i) the expert and free way the blind man reacts to the provocations of the authorities, and (ii) the way the blind man himself opens his eyes concerning Jesus.

b) A division of the text as a help to the reading:

John 9:1-5: Blindness before the evil that exists in the world

John 9:6-7: The sign of the "One sent by God" who will provoke various reactions

John 9:8-13: The reaction of the neighbours

John 9:14-17: The reaction of the Pharisees

John 9:18-23: The reaction of the parents

John 9:24-34: The final judgement of the Pharisees

John 9:35-38: The final attitude of the man born blind

John 9:39-41: A closing reflection

c) Text:

As He went along, He saw a man who had been blind from birth. His disciples asked Him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should have been born blind?' 'Neither he nor his parents sinned,' Jesus answered, 'he was born blind so that the works of God might be revealed in him. 'As long as day lasts we must carry out the work of the one who sent me; the night will soon be here when no one can work. As long as I am in the world I am the light of the world.'

Having said this, he spat on the ground, made a paste with the spittle, put this over the eyes of the blind man, and said to him, 'Go and wash in the Pool of Siloam' (the name means 'one who has been sent'). So he went off and washed and came back able to see.



His neighbors and the people who used to see him before (for he was a beggar) said, 'Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?' Some said, 'Yes, it is the same one.' Others said, 'No, but he looks just like him.' The man himself said, 'Yes, I am the one.' So they said to him, 'Then how is it that your eyes were opened?' He answered, 'The man called Jesus made a paste, daubed my eyes with it and said to me, "Go off and wash at Siloam"; so I went, and when I washed I gained my sight.' They asked, 'Where is he?' He answered, 'I don't know.' They brought the man who had been blind to the Pharisees.

It had been a Sabbath day when Jesus made the paste and opened the man's eyes, so when the Pharisees asked him how he had gained his sight, he said, 'He put a paste on my eyes, and I washed, and I can see.' Then some of the Pharisees said, 'That man cannot be from God: he does not keep the Sabbath.' Others said, 'How can a sinner produce signs like this?' And there was division among them. So they spoke to the blind man again, 'What have you to say about Him yourself, now that He has opened your eyes?' The man answered, 'He is a prophet.'

However, the Jews would not believe that the man had been blind without first sending for the parents of the man who had gained his sight and asking them, 'Is this man really the son of yours who you say was born blind? If so, how is it that he is now able to see?' His parents answered, 'We know he is our son and we know he was born blind, but how he can see, we don't know, nor who opened his eyes. Ask him. He is old enough: let him speak for himself.' His parents spoke like this out of fear of the Jews, who had already agreed to ban from the synagogue anyone who should acknowledge Jesus as the Christ. This was why his parents said, 'He is old enough; ask him.'

So the Jews sent for the man again and said to him, 'Give glory to God! We are satisfied that this man is a sinner.' The man answered, 'Whether he is a sinner I don't know; all I know is that I was blind and now I can see.' They said to him, 'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?' He replied, 'I have told you once and you wouldn't listen. Why do you want to hear it all again? Do you want to become His disciples yourselves?' At this they hurled abuse at him, 'It is you who are His disciple, we are disciples of Moses: we know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this man, we don't know where He comes from.' The man replied, 'That is just what is so amazing! You don't know where He comes from and He has opened my eyes! We know that God doesn't listen to sinners, but God does listen to people who are devout and do his will. Ever since the world began it is unheard of for anyone to open the eyes of someone born blind; if this man were not from God, He wouldn't have been able to do anything.' They retorted, 'Are you trying to teach us, and you a sinner through and through ever since you were born!' And they drove him out.

Jesus heard they had driven him out, and when he found him he said, 'Do you believe in the Son of man?' 'Sir,' the man replied, 'tell me who he is so that I may believe in him.' Jesus said, 'You have seen him; he is speaking to you.' The man said, 'Lord, I believe,' and worshipped him.

Jesus said, 'It is for judgement that I have come into this world, so that those without sight may see and those with sight may become blind.' Hearing this, some Pharisees who were present said to him, 'So we are blind, are we?' Jesus replied, 'If you were blind, you would not have sin, but since you say, "We can see," your sin remains.'

3. A moment of prayerful silence

so that the Word of God may penetrate and enlighten our life

4. Some questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

- a) What part of this text touched me most? Why?
- b) A popular saying goes, "None so blind as those who will not see!" How does this apply to the conversation between the blind man and the Pharisees?
- c) By what titles is Jesus hailed in the text? Who pronounces these? What do they mean?
- d) Which title do I like best? Why? Or, what picture of Jesus do I carry in my mind and my heart? Where does this picture come from?
- e) How can I purify my eyes to see the true Jesus of the Gospels?

5. For those who wish to delve deeper into the text

a) The context within which the Gospel of John was written:

As we meditate on the story of the healing of the blind man, it is good to keep in mind the context of the Christian communities in Asia Minor towards the end of the first century for whom the Gospel of John was written and who identified with the blind man and his healing. Because of a legalistic view of the Law of God, they were blind from birth. But, as happened with the blind man, they too were able to see the presence of God in the person of Jesus of Nazareth and were converted. It was a painful process! In describing the steps and conflicts of the healing of the blind man, the author of the Fourth Gospel recalls the spiritual journey of the community, from the darkness of blindness to the full light of faith enlightened by Jesus.

b) A commentary on the text:

John 9:1-5: Blindness before the evil that exists in the world

When the disciples see the blind man, they ask: “Rabbì, who sinned, this man or his parents, for him to have been born blind?” In those days, a physical defect or sickness was thought to be a punishment from God. Associating physical defects with sin was the way the priests of the Old Testament kept their power over people’s consciences. Jesus helps his disciples to correct their ideas: “Neither he nor his parents sinned...he was born blind so that the works of God might be displayed in him!” The works of God is the same as Sign of God. Thus, that which in those days was a sign of God’s absence, is now a sign of his brilliant presence in our midst. Jesus says: “As long as the day lasts I must carry out the work of the one who sent me; the night will soon be here when no one can work. As long as I am in the world I am the light of the world.” The **Day** of signs begins to manifest itself when Jesus, “on the third day” (Jn 2:1), makes present the “first sign” in Cana (Jn 2:11). But the day is about to end. The night is about to fall, because it is already “the seventh day”, the Sabbath, and the healing of the blind man is now the sixth sign (Jn 9:14). The **Night** is the death of Jesus. The seventh sign will be the victory over death at the resurrection of Lazarus (Jn 11). In John’s Gospel there are only seven signs, miracles, that announce the great sign, namely the Death and Resurrection of Jesus.

John 9:6-7. The sign of the “One sent by God” who will provoke various reactions

Jesus spits on the ground, forms mud with his saliva, puts the mud on the eyes of the blind man and tells him to wash in the pool of Siloam. The man goes and comes back healed. This is the sign! John comments saying that Siloam means sent. Jesus is the **One sent** by the Father who works the works of God, the signs of the Father. The sign of this ‘sending’ is that the blind man begins to see.

John 9:8-13: The first reaction: that of the neighbors

The blind man is well known. The neighbors have doubts: “Is this he?” And they ask: “How do your eyes come to be open?” The man who was blind testifies, “The **man** called Jesus opened my eyes”. The basis of our faith in Jesus is to accept that He is a human being like us. The neighbors ask: “Where is he?” - “I don’t know!” They are not satisfied with the answer of the blind man and, to clarify matters, they bring the man before the Pharisees, the religious authorities.

John 9:14-17: The second reaction: that of the Pharisees That day was a Sabbath and on the Sabbath it was forbidden to heal. When asked by the Pharisees, the man tells everything once more. Some Pharisees, blind in their observance of the law, say, “This man cannot be from God, He does not keep the Sabbath!” They could not admit that Jesus could be a sign of God because He healed the blind man on a Sabbath. But other Pharisees, faced by the sign,

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answer, "How could a sinner produce signs like this?" They were divided among themselves! So they asked the blind man, "What have you to say about him yourself, now that He has opened your eyes?" And he gives witness: "He is a **Prophet!**"

John 9:18-23: The third reaction: that of the parents

The Pharisees, now called the Jews, did not believe that he was blind. They thought that it was a matter of deception. So they called his parents and asked, "Is this man really your son who you say was born blind? If so, how is it that he is now able to see?" Very carefully the parents reply: "We know he is our son and we know he was born blind, but we don't know how it is that he can see now, or who opened his eyes. He is old enough: let him speak for himself!" The blindness of the Pharisees before the evidence of the healing produces fear among the people. And anyone who professed faith in Jesus **Messiah** was excluded from the synagogue. The conversation with the parents of the blind man reveals the truth, but the religious authorities will not accept it. Their blindness is greater because of the witness given, now they will not accept the law that says that the witness of two persons is valid (Jn 8:17).

John 9:24-34: The final judgement of the Pharisees concerning Jesus

They call the blind man again and say, "Give glory to God! For our part we know that this man is a sinner." Here: "give glory to God" meant, "Ask pardon for the lie you just pronounced!" The blind man had said, "He is a prophet!" According to the Pharisees he should have said, "He is a sinner!" But the blind man is intelligent. He replies, "I don't know if he is a sinner; I only know that I was blind and now I can see!" There are no arguments against this fact! Again the Pharisees ask, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" The blind man answers with a touch of irony: "I have told you once.... Do you want to become his disciples too?" Then they insulted him and said, "You can be his disciple, we know that God spoke to Moses, but for this man, we don't know where he comes from". Again with a touch of irony the blind man replies, "Now here is an astonishing thing! He has opened my eyes, and you don't know where he comes from! If this man were not from God, he couldn't do a thing". Faced with the blindness of the Pharisees, the light of faith grows in the blind man. He does not accept the logic of the Pharisees and confesses that Jesus **comes from the Father**. This profession of faith costs him his expulsion from the synagogue. The same was happening in the communities of the end of the first century. Those who professed faith in Jesus had to break all family and community ties. This happens today: those who decide to be faithful to Jesus run the risk of being excluded.

John 9:35-38: The attitude of faith of the blind man towards Jesus

Jesus does not abandon those who are persecuted for his sake. When Jesus hears of the expulsion and meets the man again, he helps him to take a further step by inviting him to take on his faith and asks, "Do you believe in the **Son of Man?**" He replies, "Sir...tell me who he is that I may believe in him?" Jesus said to him, "You are looking at him; he is speaking to you". The blind man exclaims, "**Lord**, I believe!" And he worships Jesus. The faith attitude of the blind man before Jesus is one of absolute trust and total acceptance. He accepts everything from Jesus. It is this faith that sustained the Christian communities of Asia towards the end of the first century, and that sustains us today.

John 9:39-41: A final reflection

The blind man who could not see ends up seeing better than the Pharisees. The communities of Asia Minor who were once blind, discover the light. The Pharisees who thought that they saw well are more blind than the man born blind. Bound by an ancient

observance, they lie when they say they can see. None more blind than those who will not see!

6. Prayer: Psalm 117 (116)

A resume of the Bible in one prayer
Praise God, all nations,
extol him, all peoples,
for his steadfast love is strong and
his faithfulness never-ending.

7. Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank you for the word that has enabled us to understand better the will of the Father. May your Spirit enlighten our actions and grant us the strength to practice what your Word has revealed to us. May we, like Mary, your mother, not only listen to but also practice the Word. You who live and reign with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.