

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

As Jesus encounters a blind man today, it gives Him the opportunity to address the disability of blindness.

I say it that way because today there is an inclination, especially by advocates, to call such disabilities not a disability, not a disadvantage, not an obstacle, but a gift. And there is no doubt for persons suffering from a disability, they often have to summon great strength and resilience to overcome the obstacles that their disability presents. It's often said that a person who loses one sense has heightened senses in the remaining four. Those may be true, but they don't make the disability a gift. It is an incapacity in one sense that God endowed upon mankind. The inability to see, hear, or speak is not a gift from God but a burden because of the fallen world.

The disciples understood that it was sin caused. *“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”* On the one hand, they understood that sin is at the root of all such incapacities. Sin so corrupted mankind and all creation that all such disabilities are a result of it. On the other hand, they misunderstood the totality of sin. Sin is not just the laws we break or the love we fail to show God or neighbor — we call those sins, actual sins. But sin is also what we call original sin: *“so deep a corruption of human nature that nothing healthy or uncorrupt remains in man's body or soul, in his inward or outward powers”* (Formula of Concord, Epitome, Article I, 8). And not only mankind but also creation itself *“was subjected to futility”* because of this sin. All of creation is in *“bondage to [sin's] corruption”* (Rom. 8:20-21).

Therefore, Jesus answered their question: *“It was not that this man sinned, or his parents”*; indeed, what could the man have done in the womb to cause such a disability? But neither had the parents done anything themselves — neither had they sinned in such a way — that their sin caused the blindness. But sin's corruption surely was the culprit of this physical blindness.

Jesus continued His response: *“but that the works of God might be displayed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”* Therefore, Jesus proceeded to do the Father's work among the people. He caused light to shine in the man's eyes again. He made mud from dirt and His saliva and smeared it on the man's eyes. Then He told him to go wash in the Pool of Siloam. The man did, and the man began again to see ... a wonderful miracle. On this Laetare Sunday, we rejoice and praise the Lord for this undoing of sin's corruption. It's a foretaste of the redemption that awaits all of us in the glory of the resurrection.

But this physical blindness also gave Jesus the opportunity to address another blindness, spiritual blindness. Indeed, Jesus said: *“For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.”* This blindness is more difficult to diagnose, and, if left uncorrected, it’s more deleterious. Some measure of this blindness afflicted everyone in our Gospel lesson — the disciples, the man born blind, the Pharisees. Some measure of this blindness surely afflicts all of us.

The disciples had a measure of this blindness; we’ve already talked about that. They misunderstood the extent of sin and sin’s corrupting power. Theirs was a mild case of blindness, quickly remedied. Jesus showed the disciples their error as He put on display *“the works of God”* and healed the blind man. And so, after their spiritual blindness was healed, we hear no more of the disciples in this account.

The man born physically blind was also spiritually blind. He knew it was a *“man called Jesus”* who healed his blindness, but he didn’t know who Jesus was (John 9:11). When he was forced to bear witness, all he could say at first was, *“He is a prophet.”* It’s true, of course, that Jesus filled a prophetic office — He was the prophet like unto Moses, speaking His Father’s words — but He was also much more than that.

Therefore, after the man had been cast out by the Pharisees, Jesus found him and took on this blindness. Jesus asked the man, *“Do you **believe** in the Son of Man?”* And the man answered, *“who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?”* Jesus bore witness of Himself: *“You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.”* And the man’s spiritual blindness was healed — *“Lord, I believe,”* he confessed, *“and he worshiped [Jesus].”* He who did not see was given spiritual sight to the rejoicing of the angels in heaven.

The Pharisees were also spiritually blind, and they had the worst case of it. They refused to see. As the saying goes, *“There are none so blind as those who will not see. The most deluded people are those who choose to ignore what they already know.”*

The Pharisees knew who Jesus was. He had been doing miracles; for example, healing an invalid so that he could walk again. But Jesus did it on the Sabbath, so they refused to see Jesus for who He was. In our Gospel today, Jesus healed this blind man; but it was a Sabbath, they reasoned, and so Jesus must be a sinner.

The man born blind bore witness to them: *“Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”* *“Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing”* (John 9:25, 32-33). But the Pharisees hardened their hearts; they accused the man and cast him out.

The Pharisees knew who Jesus was and who He claimed to be. Jesus had been bearing witness about Himself. He “*was ... calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God*” (John 5:18); Jesus was the Son of God and God Himself. That was unacceptable to them, and they refused to hear it. They considered themselves among “*those who see.*” In their rejection of Jesus, they had become blind, lost, guilty, condemned.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we have been washed; we have been given sight by word and sacrament; yet, in each of us, there remains a bit of spiritual blindness, a bit of darkness. This malady can be remedied by God alone, working through the Holy Spirit to move us to acknowledge the spiritual blindnesses we have, to repent of them, and to look to Jesus, the Light of the world. Only this way can we, who are born not seeing and who by are sin are plunged again into darkness, see with sin and guilt removed and live in the light.

Therefore, God grant that we might listen to Jesus and confess Him. God grant that we might hear His word of instruction and exhortation and promise and believe, that those blindnesses that remain might be washed away along with all guilt, that we might see Jesus ever more clearly and be accounted righteous in Him. And God grant that we, who once were in darkness, might now and ever walk as children of light.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.