

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

In today's Gospel, we are shown Jesus, significantly, through the eyes of a man Jesus encounters, a man born blind, although as is our custom, we focus mainly on the Lord's words on the Lord's day.

We don't know much about this man, except for his blindness. We can infer that although he was old enough to be called a man, yet he must have been fairly young, since his parents were still living. He remains nameless throughout the text—that may be a clue that who he is is less important than what Jesus did and said. So, this man goes from being the "*man blind from birth*," to the "*man who had formerly been blind*," but he is never named.

We infer also that the man must not have known Jesus or had not heard about Him before this. When asked by the Pharisees, "*who healed you?*" the man told them about "*the man called Jesus*," and said, "*He is a prophet*." But he had apparently not heard of Jesus before. He certainly didn't thron to meet Jesus and beg for healing.

The chapter begins with Jesus encountering this man and with the disciples asking a question—it remains pertinent today: "*who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?*" People continue to ask this question today, for much publicized events like natural disasters and terrorist attacks, and for little known events like the death of a loved one or the onset of a terminal illness. "*What did we do*," we ask? "*What did I do to deserve this? What sin did I commit?*"

Jesus' answer to the disciples then is just as relevant to us now: "*It was not that this man sinned, or his parents . . .*" And in saying that, Jesus is not denying the corrupting influence of sin in the world. Surely, as St. Paul says, "*the creation was subjected to futility*," held in "*bondage to corruption*" from its infancy until the present day (Romans 8:19-23). Indeed, God visited His destruction upon the earth in the Great Flood, not simply because of sinful man, but because by man's sin, "*the earth was corrupt in [His] sight, and . . . was filled with violence*" (Genesis 6:11).

When Jesus said, "*It was not that this man sinned, or his parents . . .*" He was also not saying that this man and his parents, of all people, had never sinned or that they were not sinners like the rest of us. No, he was answering the disciples' question that was trying to relate a particular sin to the man's malady of blindness. To that question, Jesus said, "*No! There was no particular sin in their past that caused this corruption of the eyes.*"

Now, of course, Jesus is not suggesting that actual sin never has consequences. That is trivially false. There are plenty examples from childhood on that sin has consequences: from a childhood disobedience that resulted in

punishment, to the playground scuffles that get our kids into hot water, to our own inartful or unkind words or deeds that strain relationships and break them. Sinful behavior has temporal consequences. But, in this case, Jesus is saying that this man's blindness is not a consequence of a sin that he himself or his parents committed.

On the other hand, it was an opportunity for *“the works of God [to] be displayed in him.”* So Jesus did. He mixed a bit of dirt with His saliva and made mud. Then He anointed the man's eyes with the mud and told him to wash in the Pool of Siloam. The man did just as Jesus told him, and his eyes were healed! What a miracle! Nothing like that seen before—not *“since the world began.”* Just as foretold by the prophet Isaiah: *“Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him.”*

The servant Isaiah is speaking about is the Christ, anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power, the beloved Son of the Father, sent as *“a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.”* As Jesus enlightened the darkness in this man's eyes, He showed Himself to be the One come into *“the world”* as *“the light of the world.”*

But this miracle was just the appetizer for this *“man who had formerly been blind,”* for there is a blindness worse than being born without sight. There is the blindness of those who refuse to see. The prophet Jeremiah was told to *“Declare this in the house of Jacob; proclaim it in Judah: ‘Hear this, O foolish and senseless people, who have eyes, but see not, who have ears, but hear not’”* (Jeremiah 5:21). A commentator wrote a memorable phrase commenting on this passage: there is *“none so blind as those that will not see”* (Matthew Henry's Commentary).

Our Old Testament lesson also warns of those who *“[see] many things, but [do] not observe them; [whose] ears are open, but [do] not hear.”* The prophet here was referring especially to Israel, but this commentator reminds us again that *“The character of this people [Israel] is the true character of all people by nature, till the grace of God has wrought a change.”*

Jesus wrought a change in the man born blind, not only with His physical eyes, but with his eyes of faith. This man was called before the religious leaders to make a confession: *“Who did this to you?”* *“Jesus did,”* was his answer. *“He's a prophet.”* He was challenged: *“Who do you think you are, you nobody, you beggar, you sinner?! Trying to teach us?”* But he continued to confess, until finally he was cast out. His eyes had been opened, only to see the cruelty and injustice in the world — by the men of God!

But the man born blind had also acquired much more than physical sight. Jesus sought him out and asked him, “*Do you believe in the Son of Man?*” The man, still unsure, answered, “*And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?*” “*Jesus said to him, ‘You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.’ He said, ‘Lord, I believe,’ and he worshiped him.*”

This man had been enlightened by the Light of the World Himself. Faith had been awakened in him, and he began to believe. The Pharisees, on the other hand, refused to believe in Jesus. And Jesus spoke His judgment on them both: “*For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.*”

This encounter teaches us. It teaches us that God still works through cross and suffering to manifest His works in us. For Jesus came not just to heal physical ailments, but something far more corrupted, our sinful nature. Jesus came to redeem our sinful bodies. He came to bear the sins we commit and take the punishment for sins that we commit, so that we are not punished for them forever. Although we acknowledge that there are still temporal consequences for sin, we are not subject to eternal punishment for our sins because Christ has taken them unto Himself and has been punished in our place.

And we know that God’s works are still manifest among us, not necessarily healing physical blindness, but our spiritual blindness, lighting our darkness, shining the light of His truth into our hearts “*to give [us] the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*” He bids us, be washed in the font, and we come forth sins forgiven, the Spirit given. We come forth believing and confessing—a disciple. He bids us eat bread and drink wine that when combined with His own instituting words anoints our mouths and tongues with His very body and blood—much more palatable than mud, I’d say. But as Luther reminds us, even if God had decided to use straw to bestow our forgiveness, it would be a precious thing, and we’d be using straw today.

Instead, He gives us water and His word to bestow new life; He gives us bread and wine to bestow forgiveness of sins through His body and blood. Our physical eyes don’t see this; they’re blind to these miracles. But the eyes of faith behold them and the power of Jesus’ merit behind them, and we confess, “*This is the Lord’s doing and it is marvelous in our eyes!*” We admit, in these we encounter Jesus. By these we acknowledge, though we were blind, now we see—we believe. And we pray, “*Gracious God, keep us steadfast in this confession and faith, and help us to rejoice in this amazing grace!*”

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