

Homily on the Sunday of the Blind Man

Sunday, 2 June 2019

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, One God. Amen.

The miracle described in today's Gospel (John 9:1-38) is even more remarkable than it might seem at first. Saint Basil and other Fathers tell us that this was not just a case of giving sight to a blind man born with eyes that did not function, but to someone who had no eyes at all! The second Exapostilarion for this Sunday says, "While passing by, our Saviour found * a blind man lacking eyes from his birth."

The Gospel says, "Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind" (John 9:32). There are examples in the Old Testament (Tobit 2:17) and the New Testament (Mark 8:22-26) of blind people receiving sight, but this is something completely unprecedented.

The Saviour placed clay in the man's empty sockets and told him to wash in the pool of Siloam. When he obeyed these instructions, the eyes of clay became living eyes!

When we look at the miraculous healings of Christ, we can see a general pattern. Usually the healing occurs after the sick person or a close friend or relative approaches Jesus to seek healing such as the nobleman at Capernaum (John 4:46-47), the centurion's servant (Luke 7:1-3) and Jairus (Lk.8:41).

At other times it involves Jesus asking the sick person or the acquaintance a question like: "Do you wish to be healed?", as with the paralytic 2 weeks ago on the 4th Sunday of Pascha (John 5:6). Or; "What do you want me to do for you?", as with the blind man in Luke 18:41.

Only very occasionally, such as in today's Gospel (6th Sun. Pascha; John 9:1-38), does Jesus heal the sick with no prior demonstration of that desire on their part. The blind man did not ask Jesus to restore his sight nor did Jesus ask him if he wanted to be made well.

In fact, the blind man seems to have little faith and/or no knowledge of who Christ is. When questioned by his neighbours about the restoration of his sight, the blind man does not credit his own faith or Jesus as the Messiah.

The man knows the name of Jesus, but he does not know where He is (v.11-12). Let me ask the question: Does this sound familiar to you, especially when you are sick or in ill health? When we are sick or in ill health, we either get well or we go to the doctor for treatment and we recover. During our sickness and healing we have little or no awareness of the presence of Christ and His divine power. People may ask how we got better but seldom is there a mention of Jesus Christ on our part.

Just like the blind man in today's gospel, we are called to reflect upon our experiences of healing and understand the presence and involvement of Christ in those miraculous events.

After being questioned by his neighbours, the blind man was brought before the Pharisees. Those religious leaders are only focusing on finding the person who violated the Sabbath, when they ask the man: "What do you say about Him because He opened your eyes?" The blind man answers: "He is a prophet" (v.17).

The faith of the blind man is growing. He does not stay with his original answer, but now acknowledges that a man from God, and thus God Himself, was involved in his healing.

The Pharisees continue to pressurise the blind man in order to call Jesus a sinner, so that they can discredit Him and His works, but the blind man remains resolute.

The Pharisees already knew about Jesus and they were obviously intimidating the people to disavow and denounce Him as the Messiah. The blind man's parents were afraid of being put out of the synagogue (v.22). Even after the Pharisees reviled him, the man who was once blind and a beggar, now speaks with boldness about Jesus saying: "If this man were not from God, He could do nothing" (v.33).

Too often we react as the parents of the blind man and are afraid to acknowledge Christ as our Lord and Saviour and Healer in our life because we do not want to be perceived as naïve, blind or too religious, as zealots, as bible bashers. We are afraid that we might be shunned from certain social and professional groups.

Although doctors, nurses and health professionals are very important in healing people, we must never forget that all healing, great and small is a gift from God. We participate to various degrees in that healing but ultimately it is of divine origin.

If we are courageous enough to confess Christ as the Physician and Healer of our souls and bodies, and it causes us to be marginalized by our friends, colleagues and perhaps even our family, what then can we do?

The blind man was driven out of the synagogue (v.34) and then Jesus seeks him out and finds him and asks him: "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" (v.35).

If we remain resolute and faithful, even if we don't understand everything or how everything fits together in God's plan, Christ will seek us out and find us and ask us to trust Him even more. The journey of faith is in some sense infinite but the object of our belief, Christ our God, will always be walking with us.

In a way, we are all part of a generation of people born blind. Most of us were born outside of faith in the Lord. According to an ancient plan, our spiritual eyes should have remained closed until our very death. And millions upon millions of people would have gone to eternity without knowing God, or their own souls, or even the spiritual world itself. Everything was done to ensure that we, born blind from parents who were to one or another extent also born blind, would remain that way forever.

But God worked a miracle on us. Without asking us whether we believe or not, without tormenting us over this question, although knowing that this faith was not in us, the Lord anointed us with clay as with holy myrrh, and millions upon millions of people have been healed. Their spiritual eyes were opened.

Through the centuries, blind people who were healed liked the man blind from birth, were subjected to difficult trials, interrogations, torture, death; and mockery by the Pharisees of their time, and many were cut off from friends and relatives. What happened to the man blind from birth in the Gospels happened also to many of us.

Today's Gospel text shows us how a man born blind has become someone who sees and becomes a faithful confessor of Christ, while some of the educated Pharisees who could see with their physical eyes remained in their spiritual blindness refusing to believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

Therefore, we see that God can turn a disabled person into a teacher, a missionary, a man sent by Him in the world. This is why we confess together with the blind man healed that Jesus is the Son of God, Who became man out of love for humans and for their salvation, and enlightened by the grace of Jesus, we pray to Him, the One who is glorified together with the Father and the Holy Spirit!

Amen.

CHRIST IS RISEN!