

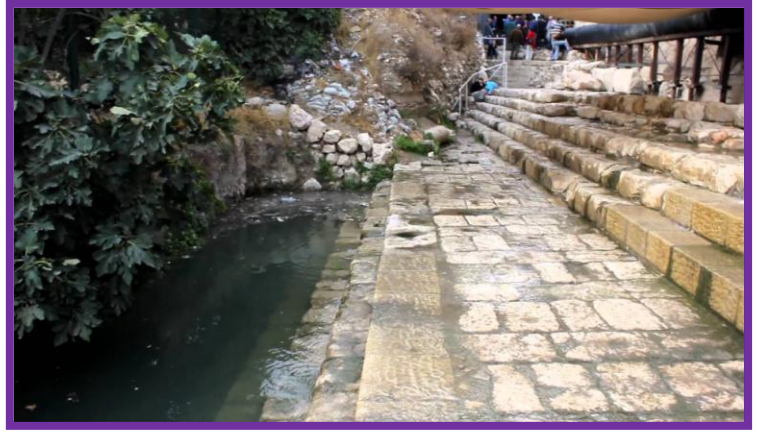
March 26, 2017
4th Sunday of Lent
John 9:1-41

1 As he [Jesus] passed by he saw a man blind from birth. 2 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" 3 Jesus answered, "Neither he nor his parents sinned; it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him. 4 We have to do the works of the one who sent me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work. 5 While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." 6 When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva, and smeared the clay on his eyes, 7 and said to him, "Go wash in the Pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed, and came back able to see. 8 His neighbors and those who had seen him earlier as a beggar said, "Isn't this the one who used to sit and beg?" 9 Some said, "It is," but others said, "No, he just looks like him." He said, "I am."

10 So they said to him, "(So) how were your eyes opened?" 11 He replied, "The man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and told me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' So I went there and washed and was able to see." 12 And they said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I don't know." 13 They brought the one who was once blind to the Pharisees. 14 Now Jesus had made clay and opened his eyes on a Sabbath. 15 So then the Pharisees also asked him how he was able to see. He said to them, "He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and now I can see." 16 So some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, because he does not keep the Sabbath." (But) others said, "How can a sinful man do such signs?" And there was a division among them. 17 So they said to the blind man again, "What do you have to say about him, since he opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet."

18 Now the Jews did not believe that he had been blind and gained his sight until they summoned the parents of the one who had gained his sight. 19 They asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How does he now see?" 20 His parents answered and said, "We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. 21 We do not know how he sees now, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him, he is of age; he can speak for himself." 22 His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone acknowledged him as the Messiah, he would be expelled from the synagogue. 23 For this reason his parents said, "He is of age; question him."

24 So a second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, "Give God the praise! We know that this man is a sinner." 25 He replied, "If he is a sinner, I do not know. One thing I do know is that I was blind and now I see." 26 So they said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" 27 He answered them, "I told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?" 28 They ridiculed him and said, "You are that man's disciple; we are disciples of Moses! 29 We know that God spoke to Moses, but we do not know where this one is from." 30 The man answered and said to them, "This is what is so amazing, that you do not know where he is from, yet he opened my eyes. 31 We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if one is devout and does his will, he listens to him. 32 It is unheard of that anyone ever opened the eyes of a person born blind. 33 If this man were not from God, he would not be able to do anything." 34 They answered and said to him, "You were born totally in sin, and are you trying to teach us?" Then they threw him out.



The Pools Siloam, In the Kidron Valley outside the City of David Jerusalem, Israel

35 When Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, he found him and said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" 36 He answered and said, "Who is he, sir that I may believe in him?" 37 Jesus said to him, "You have seen him and the one speaking with you is he." 38 He said, "I do believe, Lord," and he worshiped him. 39 Then Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see might see, and those who do see might become blind." 40 Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not also blind, are we?" 41 Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you are saying, 'We see,' so your sin remains.

Background

Being blind is usually associated with one's inability to see the physical world. The culture in which Jesus lived understood blindness in much broader terms. For example, Luke's Gospel states that Jesus restored many who were blind. (Luke 7:12) But the Gospel itself only records one instance of curing a physically blind person. However, there are many accounts in Luke and Acts where people refused to see/understand, and there also many times when people chose to come to a new understanding, to see things in a new way.

In this text from John's Gospel, it is not the healing of a man who has been blind from birth that is the real focus of the text. John describes that incident in the first seven verses. The majority of the text is devoted to those who are trying to make sense of what has happened. Even the man's neighbors are confused about what has taken place. Some cannot even believe that he was really the same person.

Therefore, the text is really about the confusion and the struggle to understand what has taken place, and its meaning. The man himself knows what took place, but he struggles with what it means. The Pharisees struggle to understand both what actually took place, and also what it means. First, they question the man himself, and ask how it is that he is now able to see. Then they question if he was actually born blind. Nowhere in text does anyone question whether the blind man has been healed. The struggle is about what this event means for people. The Pharisees focus on the fact that the healing took place on the Sabbath. In their understanding, to heal is work, which was forbidden on the Sabbath. To them, this means Jesus must not be from God, because no one from God would work on a Sabbath, and Jesus did, so he must be a sinner. Once they come to this conclusion, they look for ways to support their position. In contrast, the man himself struggles with who this is that has brought him sight. In the beginning of the text he only knows him as the man, Jesus (verse 11). Eventually he comes to look on Jesus as a prophet (verse 17). At the end of the text he sees Jesus as the "Son of Man" (verse 36).

Throughout his gospel, John uses nameless people to represent the Christians of his community. Many in John's community would have been Jews who were expelled from the synagogue for their belief in Jesus as the Messiah. They were considered blind or misguided by their fellow Jews. This text speaks to them of their experience of coming to believe in Jesus. Jesus was the light of the world and gave true meaning to life.

Reflection Questions

1. How do you respond when you encounter someone who is blind? How do you respond when you encounter people who seem to be blind to some truth of their life?
2. Can you identify the effects of sinfulness in your own life, in your family, and in your community? Have there been times when you were blind to those effects?
3. Can you also identify the effects of grace in your own life, and in the lives of your family and your community?

4. At the beginning of the Gospel text, the man is blind, a beggar, and an outcast. At the end of the text, he is still an outcast, and probably still a beggar. What has changed? Is the path of his change giving you insights about how God may be leading you to a fuller relationship with God?
5. Although Jesus has done something unheard of in his day, restoring the sight of one born blind, this outpouring of compassion and healing leaves room for people to be confused and to wonder about its meaning. What does that say to you about how God desires to be present to us?
6. Are you aware of areas in your own life where you have been blind? Were there things that you did to hold on to your blindness? What are some things/events that led to you recognize your blindness? Are there people who helped you to recognize your blindness?
7. What parts of this text do you find appealing? Are there also parts of this text that are disturbing or difficult?
8. Jesus does not seem to be put off by being the source of confusion; in fact, at the end of the text, he comes forward to the man who has received sight to be present to him in an even more significant way. Are there places where you would like to invite Jesus, to bring his light to your confusion?

The reflection and questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel.
<http://il-ritiro.org/gospel-reflections.aspx>

