



## SUNDAY OF THE BLIND MAN

May 21

### THE GOSPEL READING

**John 9:1-38**

[The Man Born Blind Sees]

*At that time, as Jesus passed by, he saw a man blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him. We must work the works of him who sent me, while it is day; night comes, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." As he said this, he spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle and anointed the man's eyes with the clay, saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing. The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar, said, "Is not this the man who used to sit and beg?" Some said, "It is he"; others said, "No, but he is like him." He said, "I am the man." They said to him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" He answered, "The man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash'; so I went and washed and received my sight." They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."*

*They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. The Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, "He put clay on my eyes and I washed, and I see." Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" There was a division among them. So they again said to the blind man, "What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet."*

*The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight, until*



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they called the parents of the man who had received his sight, and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age, he will speak for himself." His parents said this because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess him to be Christ he was to be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, "He is of age, ask him."

So for the 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." He answered, "Whether he is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see." They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" He answered them, "I have told you already and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you too want to become his disciples?"

And they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." The man answered, "Why, this is a marvel! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. 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." They answered him, "You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?" And they cast him out.

Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, "Do you believe in the Son of man?" He 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 speaks to you." He said, "Lord, I believe"; and he worshipped him.

## THE SERMON

The Lord was walking in the vicinity of Jerusalem with His disciples, and He sees a man who was blind. The man is described as having been blind from birth. At that time, it was thought that this condition was a result of sin. The Law of Moses, given by God to the Jewish people over a thousand years before the birth of Christ, taught them that they would be blessed in every way if they obeyed God's commandments. The Law also warned that if they disobeyed and instead followed the ways and practices of the nations around them (who worshiped many gods), they would not find blessings but sorrows.

The Jewish people had therefore, mistakenly concluded that sickness and suffering were always caused by sin. So, when the disciples see the blind man, they ask, "Rabbi,

who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" In their minds, this kind of disability had to have been caused by a particular sin. Since the blindness existed from birth, they thought it was perhaps because of the sins committed by the blind man's parents. The Lord Jesus answers, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him."

In this way, Jesus provides two important clarifications. Firstly, there is not always a direct correlation between sin and sickness. Secondly, the disability in question, far from being associated with sin, is an opportunity for the manifestation of the grace and glory of God.

The Lord says, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." This is significant because light is precisely what the blind man could not perceive. His condition was not the direct result of sin, yet the man was in great need of seeing the light, both physically and spiritually. In his encounter with Jesus, physical and spiritual vision is granted to him. We read that the Lord spat on the ground, made clay with saliva, and anointed the man's eyes with the clay, asking him to go and wash in the pool of Siloam.

That pool was the only source of fresh water within Jerusalem. It was by that pool that Jesus, on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, said, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them" (John 7:37-38). In Hebrew, the word 'siloam' means 'sent.' The man obeyed, went and washed, and returned having received his sight.

Jesus is the Son of God. He is the One "sent" by the Father. He is the One who has been "sent" to save the world. Through the Son, the Father created the world, and He created humankind "out of dust from the ground" (Genesis 2:7). Here, the Lord Jesus combines the dust of the ground with the water of His mouth – prefiguring Baptism – to anoint the blind man where his eyes would have been. Humankind has been created from the dust of the earth, and now water is added for a new miracle of creation. The Lord is, in effect, saying, "Let there be light" (Genesis 1:3).

Jesus sends the blind man to wash his eyes with holy water at the pool of Siloam, which represents the power of the Holy Spirit. The clay symbolizes our birth from God, and the water is a sign of our Baptism, our new birth from the Holy Spirit. As Saint Cyril of Alexandria explains, "[the formerly blind man's] understanding was in some way enlightened at the same time as his bodily eyes, and as he possesses the light of the physical sun in his fleshly eyes, so the intellectual beam, I mean the illumination by the Spirit, takes up its abode within him, and he receives it into his heart."

The man washes and comes back able to see. The people who knew him are shocked, asking one another if he was the man who had been blind. Then they ask him what happened, and he testifies to his encounter with Jesus and how He healed him. The people then took the man to the religious leaders, who object to the healing on the Sabbath, the day of rest.

What a paradox that the blind man was made to see while the religious leaders,

who thought they saw and knew better, were blind in spiritual terms. They could not see God's grace. They could not open themselves to the miracle in front of them. They cared more about the rules than the mercy of God.

The formerly blind man then gives a confession of faith that applies to all of us when we reflect on the grace that God has given to us: "one thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see." The religious leaders are enraged and cast him out of the synagogue. The man's confession provides a further opportunity for the man to grow in his faith, for when Jesus finds him, He asks him, "Do you believe in the Son of man?" The man answers, "And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?" The Lord responds: "You have seen Him, and it is He who speaks to you." The man confesses: "Lord, I believe," and he worships Him.

There is not necessarily a direct link between sin and suffering. As a general rule, when we live away from God, when we disobey Him, we open ourselves even more to the temptations of this world which enslave and hurt us. We give in to the suffering resulting from the general Fall of Adam and Eve. And yet, sickness and suffering are never a punishment from God. He often allowed illness and suffering to afflict the greatest of Saints. In such cases, illness becomes a means for salvation, for it becomes an opportunity for the grace of God to be manifested in the world.

The formerly blind man now sees fully. We are also called to see fully within the spiritual realm. Through the waters of baptism, the clay that blinds our eyes is washed away, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Through faith, God the Father recreates us by the Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ. Our Creator gives sight to our eyes in the same way He created humankind. As He gives us spiritual eyes to see, we can worship Him, as we "give God the praise." May we ever glorify Him, remembering His grace and loving embrace, for it is He Who gives us sight to see as we open ourselves to His Love for us.