SUNDAY OF THE BLIND MAN
June 9

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 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 Gospel story of the healing of the man born blind is the story of every person who receives Christ into their hearts. With God’s grace, we begin to spiritually see things rightly. In seeing rightly, we believe rightly. And in believing rightly, we can live according to the Commandments and receive God’s blessings.

The Lord is walking in the vicinity of Jerusalem with His disciples, and He sees a man who has been blind since birth. At that time, it was thought that all sickness was the direct result of sin. The Law of Moses, given by God to the Jewish people, taught that they would be blessed in every way if they obeyed God’s commandments. The Law also warned that if they disobeyed the Law and instead followed the ways of the nations around them, they would not find blessings but sorrows.
The Jewish people had 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 clarifies two essential things.

First, there is not always a direct correlation between sin and sickness. Sickness and death are ultimately rooted in our fallen nature caused by the Original (Ancestral) Sin of Adam of Eve. Sometimes, sickness results from our personal sins, like doing harmful things to ourselves. But at other times, physical ailments and other forms of suffering are permitted by God to purify us and to bring us into closer communion with Christ. On the Cross, Christ transformed suffering into a means of healing and salvation. For “by His wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5).

Second, the healing of sickness and suffering is a manifestation of the power and goodness of God. Often, we take for granted all of God’s blessings in life — even life itself. When we suffer or lose one of these blessings, we are tempted to call everything into question. But when we cry out to God, and He heals us, we have a much greater appreciation of the big and little things of life — like good health. In this case, the blindness of the man 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. He is purified and illumined.

We read that the Lord spat on the ground, made clay with saliva, and anointed the man’s eyes with the clay. In a similar way, God created humankind from the dust of the earth and breathed into us the breath of life (Genesis 2:7). Here, water is added for the miracle of re-creation — spiritual rebirth. The Lord Jesus combines the dust of the ground with the water from His mouth — prefiguring the Holy Spirit — to anoint the blind man where his eyes would have been.

Jesus then tells the man to go and wash in the pool of Siloam, which is a symbol of Baptism. This pool was the only source of fresh water within Jerusalem. It was by this pool that Jesus 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.” 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. The man obeys, goes and washes, and returns having received his sight. 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 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 take the man to the religious leaders, who object to the healing on the Sabbath, the day of rest.

It is a paradox that the blind man was made to see what the religious leaders, who thought they knew better, could not see. They cared more about the letter of the Law than the spirit of the Law, which gives the Law its true meaning. They cared more about following rules than people experiencing the mercy of God. Because of their blindness and hard-heartedness, they are incapable of experiencing God’s grace in the miracle happening right in front of them.

The healed man gives a confession of faith that can be a model for each one of us. Standing before the religious leaders, he admits what he does not know but proclaims what he does know. As Christians, we don’t have to know everything or provide answers to every question. We can repeat the words of the healed man born blind: “One thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see.” We can simply say that before Christ, I was lost, and now I am found.

The religious leaders are enraged and cast the healed man 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.

The formerly blind man now sees fully. Having opened the blind man’s eyes, the Lord opens his heart and illumines his spirit. We are also called to see fully within the spiritual realm. Through the waters of Baptism and the power of the Holy Spirit, the clay that blinds our eyes is washed away. Through the Holy Sacraments, God the Father recreates us by the Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ. By our faith and repentance, He gives us spiritual eyes to see so that we can worship Him and “give God the praise.” May we ever glorify Him, remembering His grace and merciful love. For it is Christ who opens our eyes when we open our hearts to Him.