

ENCOUNTER

Lenten Program 2014

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*Fourth Sunday
of Lent*





I don't know if he is a sinner; I only know that I was blind and now I can see." (John 9:25)

OPENING PRAYER

Leader: Let us pause and call to mind
God's presence within and among
us, today and always.

Brief pause.

**All: Gracious God,
open my ears that I may listen
with attentiveness to your
Word of encouragement.
Open my heart
that I may be alert to
the challenge you offer.
I pray with confidence,
in Jesus' name. Amen.**

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PS 22



**R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is
nothing I shall want.**

The LORD is my shepherd;
there is nothing I shall want.
Fresh and green are the pastures
where he gives me repose.
Near restful waters he leads me;
he revives my soul. *R.*

He guides me along the right path,
for the sake of his name.
Though I should walk in the valley of the
shadow of death,
no evil would I fear, for you are with me.
Your crook and your staff will give me
comfort. *R.*

You have prepared a table before me
in the sight of my foes.
My head you have anointed with oil;
my cup is overflowing. *R.*

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life.
In the LORD'S own house shall I dwell
for length of days unending. *R.*

GOSPEL: JOHN 9:1-3. 6-9. 13-17. 24-25. 34-38



As Jesus went along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, for him to have been born blind?" "Neither he nor his parents sinned," Jesus answered, "he was born blind so that the works of God might be displayed in him." Having said this, he spat on the ground, made a paste with the spittle, put this over the eyes of the blind man and said to him, "Go and wash in the Pool of Siloam" (a name that means 'sent'). So the blind man went off and washed himself, and came away with his sight restored.

His neighbours and people who earlier had seen him begging said, "Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?" Some said, "Yes, it is the same one." Others said, "No, he only looks like him." The man himself said, "I am the man." They brought the man who had been blind to the Pharisees. It had been a sabbath day when Jesus made the paste and opened the man's eyes, so when the Pharisees asked him how he

had come to see, he said, "He put a paste on my eyes, and I washed, and I can see." Then some of the Pharisees said, "This man cannot be from God: he does not keep the sabbath." Others said, "How could a sinner produce signs like this?" And there was disagreement among them. So they spoke to the blind man again, "What have you to say about him yourself, now that he has opened your eyes?" "He is a prophet" replied the man

So the Jews again sent for the man and said to him, "Give glory to God! For our part, we know that this man is a sinner." The man answered, "I don't know if he is a sinner; I only know that I was blind and now I can see." "Are you trying to teach us," they replied "and you a sinner through and through, since you were born!" And they drove him away.

Jesus heard they had driven him away, and when he found him he said to him, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" "Sir," the man replied "tell me who he is so that I may believe in him." Jesus said, "You are looking at him; he is speaking to you." The man said, "Lord, I believe," and worshipped him.

Pause for silent reflection.

FR GREG'S GOSPEL REFLECTION



In last Sunday's Gospel, Jesus asked the woman at the well some challenging theological questions which were theoretical in nature. In today's Gospel

Jesus meets a man whose very condition raises challenging questions which are immediate and practical. The man in question was born blind. Unlike other similar passages, the man does not seek Jesus hoping for a cure; in our Gospel, it is Jesus who approaches the man born blind. The disciples ask Jesus whose sin caused this man to be born blind. They are really asking him why and how he was born blind. The theology of the time attributed any misfortune or tragedy to the sin of some person or persons. It was believed that my sins bring punishment, and if someone is born into misfortune it must be because of someone's sins, and in this case most probably one or both parents. In spite of the Book of Job, the people of Jesus' time still wanted an explanation for evil; someone or something had to be blamed. In Luke Chapter 13 Jesus begins to answer the question; there he says that those who died in the collapse of the tower of Siloam were no worse than anyone else living in Jerusalem at that time; they did not die because of their sins. In today's Gospel Jesus gives a clear answer, "neither he nor his parents sinned." Then why was he born blind? "...so that the works of God might be displayed in him."

We often think that good things come our way because we have been good, and that misfortune is the consequence of sin. This is not so. We think like this because our horizon of thought is limited to this world. In fact we are made by God to live eternally with him in glory. Jesus, who has come from the Father and returns to the

Father, extends our perspective in such a way that these questions are resolved by a movement of the soul away from the question, which imprisons us within our own limitations, towards God. Jesus now cures the man by applying to the eyes a paste made from dust of the earth and spittle. The allusion to Genesis is striking; using the same dust with which humankind was made, Jesus gives the man the sight which at creation God had intended us all to have.

No longer blind, the man's very presence becomes a challenging question for the Pharisees. Who did this, and what sort of man does this on the Sabbath? The focus of this next set of questions is Jesus. The Pharisees struggle with a dilemma. The law has been broken, yet something which only God can do has happened. In our Gospel the Pharisees do not dialogue with Jesus. However in John Chapter 5 where, on a previous Sabbath, Jesus cures by the Pool of Bethzatha, they do ask him why he works on the Sabbath. Here Jesus says "my Father goes on working and so do I." In other words he is exempt from the Sabbath precept because he must do his Father's will. This is the answer to the question; alas it does not resolve the issue for the Pharisees who continue to struggle with the dilemma. Their question is an obstacle to their relationship with God. Sometimes we need to let go of our questions before we can incarnate the answer. Jesus now looks for and finds the man. Up to now the dialogue has involved onlookers trying to understand the extraordinary cure. Now

the dialogue is between Jesus and the man born blind. Jesus asks "do you believe in the Son of Man?" The man answers "Sir, tell me who he is so that I may believe in him". This is not a simplistic response. I think that this man has been given more than sight; there has been a significant inner movement which has given him spiritual sight. He now seeks the *One* on whom to gaze with the eyes of his soul. Jesus' question articulates the man's inner question which is not simply about the meaning of life; it is about the One who gives meaning to life. When he says "tell me who he is," he wants to be directed to the One that his eyes long to see. As Jesus says "you are looking at him", the scales fall away from his eyes and he recognises Jesus, believes and worships.

The questions about evil, sin, and the identity of Jesus, which are raised in this Gospel are resolved in the man born blind. We will only resolve our issues by entering within ourselves to encounter and *see* Jesus. The man "was born blind so that the works of God might be displayed *in* him."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever thought that you needed to earn God's love and approval even though God's love for you does not depend on what you do?
2. Do you know anyone who has had unfortunate experiences which impel them to turn away from other people, the Church or God, or who has questions which cripple them? What is the real problem? What can be done? Sometimes we have to let go of our questions.

SR HILDA'S SPIRITUAL DIRECTION



In our walk this Lent, here we are once again being asked to let go of something. As it happens this week it is to discover and let go of our blindness and to accept a new aspect of our relationship with Jesus. In this Gospel passage we are invited to experience in a far deeper way, just how much we are loved and sought by God.

Many families have their share of “the undesirable,” “the wounded,” and “the blind”. I knew someone whose grandfather was an alcoholic. He died in 1952 but he had given up alcohol by then, he had seen the light about ten years earlier. From a woefully poor immigrant background, he had a sister of whom he was especially fond. They did everything together as children and when he came to Sydney in the late 1800's to work on the wharves, it broke his heart to leave her behind. To all accounts she was beautiful both inside and out. I don't know her name, on the one occasion my friend heard about her, she was simply called “Dadda's sister.” Her “Pop”, as she called him, lost contact with her, she seemed to disappear, no one knew where she was and because he couldn't read or write, his chances of finding her were very slim. It was the ache of his life and no doubt did not help his drinking habits at all. Years went by and out of the blue one day, “Pop” got word of an address where he might find her. Needless to say he set off at once and spent days following every lead that came his way. Finally

he found her, in a room at the back of a derelict building somewhere in Sydney. The room had an earthen floor and there she was bent over a stick fire, cooking a sausage, nothing of her beauty remained. The story goes that “Pop,” a tall, strong, fair haired man, slumped against the wall and cried. She was unkempt, unclean and thoroughly disorientated. She too was an alcoholic. But he had found her and there was nothing that would ever separate them again. He took her home and even though his own family had nothing (it was Depression time) her wonderful grandmother nursed her until she died. I was told no more but I have often wondered what kind of conversations she and “Pop” might have had as she recovered her strength. I am sure he told her what her absence from his life had meant to him and since he really was a most compassionate man, I am sure he listened with many, many tears to the story of her journey to that terrible earthen floored room.

I think Jesus goes looking for us like that. I think he follows every lead and I think he too cries when he sees what our blindness has done to us. And we are all blind in one way or another. Haven't you ever asked yourself the question, “Why didn't I see that?” “What's wrong with me?” or, of others “What can't they see this or that?” “What's wrong with them?” Just like this encounter in the Gospel, Jesus never asks us why we are blind, he just offers us sight. How is it that you and I discover our blindness? I think it happens when you and I truly try to develop a relationship

with Jesus. When we take our everyday to him, when we talk about things with him, we give him the chance to widen our limited horizon, as Father Greg says. It is as though we are saying;

“Come and find me, I am blinded by my woundedness and I can’t see you.”

He will use everything to widen our vision and our Gospel today gives us a great picture of his tools. He will use the misunderstandings of others, he will use our families, their support and their non-support, he will use our own wretchedness. He will use good things too, the kindness and understanding of others, the willingness of others to give us another go. Then it seems to me, our blindness becomes a source of rejoicing, not regret or recrimination. Were it not for his blindness perhaps the man in today’s Gospel would never have looked God straight in the face and heard the words “I who am speaking to you, I am he”.

During this coming week, ask Jesus to come and find you and then give him the joy of letting him know that you have seen him!

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Have you known times of blindness? What did you learn? What did you see?
2. How did you recover your sight?
3. What has meant more to you as time has gone by, the times of sight or the times of blindness?

GUIDED MEDITATION WITH SR HILDA

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Today we will meet Jesus personally and allow him to address our blindness.

CLOSING PRAYER

**All: Healing God,
thank you for the gift of sight.
Open the eyes of my mind
that I may see more truly what
you ask of me.
Open the eyes of my heart
that I may respond with
generosity
and recognise the face of Jesus,
your Son,
in each person I meet.
I pray with confidence,
in Jesus’ name. *Amen.***

