

The Gospel reading today is about two cures and one tragedy. First, there is the healing of the blind man's eyes. Blind from birth, the man's disability has removed one of the great joys of life, the gift of sight. Not only does it exclude him from being able to appreciate the beauty of creation, but blindness, or indeed any disability, was seen by the Israelites as a punishment for sin.

The man has also been ostracized and excluded from family and society when he needs their support and comfort the most. He is all alone in life! That is, until he comes into contact with Jesus, and what an encounter that is for him!

Through Jesus' touch, the man is now able to see, but that is just the start. John's Gospel goes deeper than that to show a second cure. Slowly the man comes to recognize Jesus as "*Lord*." The man moves from sight to insight, to *faith*. That's the second cure. The man has received the gifts of physical sight and spiritual sight.

Jesus sets the man on a spiritual journey of *faith* in Him, one that progresses further every time he is asked to testify about what happened to him. After Jesus cures the man of blindness, the man simply says he has been healed by "*the man called Jesus*." Later, the man displays increased insight as he calls Jesus "*a prophet*," and still later, as one sent "*from God*."

Finally, and most profoundly, when he is asked by Jesus if he believes in the Son of Man, the man proclaims his full profession of faith in Jesus when he confesses, "*Lord, I believe*," and worships Jesus.

Taking us step by step on the man's journey of faith, John allows us to taste the great gift that Jesus has given the man, not just the gift of his eyesight but his great gift of faith. This gift is also offered to us when we open our eyes and hearts to Jesus. It gets us to look at this miracle more deeply and to reflect on who Jesus really is, and to reflect on our own spiritual journey of faith in life.

The very opposite happens with the Pharisees. They were born with physical sight but refuse to believe in Jesus; however, they are *spiritually* blind. Jesus says to them at the end, "*If you were born blind, there would be no sin in that, but you can see and refuse to believe. There is your sin*."

The Pharisees fail to accept the truth they have physically witnessed in the curing of the blind man, precisely because they do not have faith. Because of their lack of faith and their hardness of heart, the Pharisees remain blind from start to finish.

Both the Pharisees and the cured man *look* at Jesus of Nazareth. The Pharisees see only a troublemaker who is overturning their laws. In their judgment, Jesus is guilty of violating the Sabbath day of rest. They object to Jesus and His actions even though He is doing good and not doing anything evil.

But the blind man knows and the blind man sees. The man born blind clings to the simple truth of his experience of the *Lord*. "*All I know is, I was blind before, and now I see.*" The cured man accepts Christ. He sees Jesus as his Saviour, but the Pharisees reject Jesus. That's the *tragedy* that takes place in today's Gospel story.

And lastly, the final characters in the story are the blind man's parents. They distance themselves from this wonderful healing by resisting all involvement. They stay on the sidelines, afraid to make a decision. Fear of their own exclusion from the Temple overshadows the joy of their son's healing.

The blind man's growth in faith is every Catholic's growth in faith. Jesus' miracle in today's Gospel is a symbol of the faith which begins when we are washed in the water of Baptism. In Baptism, we are given the capacity to see the Christ-centred meaning of events in our lives. It is called the *gift of faith*.

We have to care for and grow in our Catholic faith. This time of Lent should be helping us all to do that. Faith is very much like sight. Both physical sight and spiritual sight are gifts that we can so easily take for granted. Throughout life we have been growing in our faith. Through faith we can see a deeper meaning in things.

Those *with faith* see Jesus as the Incarnate Word of God, the Saviour of the world. However, those *without faith* see Jesus as only a man. Those *with faith* see us as children of God. However, those *without faith* look at a fellow human being and see only a rational creature. Those *with faith* discover the Word of God when they pick up a Bible and the words in it burn in their hearts. However, those *without faith* pick up a Bible and find only empty words.

Those *with faith* see the Catholic Church, not as an institution, but as the voice and presence of the Risen Christ in our world today. They see the Real Presence of

Christ's Body in the Holy Eucharist, given up for us and His Blood poured out for us. However, those *without faith* look at the Holy Eucharist and only see bread and wine because they are lacking in faith. Those with faith see the Mass, not as a ceremony, but as the Sacrifice of Jesus for our salvation.

Those *with faith* believe that suffering is a sharing in the Cross of Christ. However, those *without faith* look at suffering and only see tragedy. Those *with faith* accept death as steps that lead to a new, fuller life through the resurrection of Christ. However, those *without faith* look at death and only see separation. Those *with faith* can see the same things others see but in a much, much deeper way.

In this Season of Lent, Jesus is inviting us to look at some of our blind spots found in today's Gospel. Our life is centred on Jesus, yet there may be things that are not so clear. Selfishness can blind us to the needs of others. Insensitivity can blind us to the hurt we're causing to others. Self-centeredness and pride can blind us to our own faults. Prejudice can blind us to the truth.

Materialism can blind us to spiritual values. Judging people can blind us to seeing them as they really are. Families and friends who are not on speaking terms because of past differences are blinding themselves to the light of God's love for one another.

The coming of faith of the man born blind is the model for our journey to Christ as we are called to live out our faith each day. Faith helps us to find our way through the darkness of our world. Faith is a deeper and more wonderful kind of seeing, a spiritual vision. In the Second Reading, St. Paul says, "*Once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light – for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.*"

Lent is a time to open our eyes of faith, to renew our Baptism, and to renew our faith in Christ. Jesus' miracle of giving the blind man his sight is a symbol of the faith which comes to us when we wash the mud from our eyes in the waters of Baptism. Baptism gives us a new life and it makes us children of God and members of God's family here on earth.