

March 22nd, 2020 – 4th Sunday of Lent
John 9.1-41

Last Sunday we reflected on the wonderful story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well, and today we have the equally compelling story of a man born blind and his journey to faith in Jesus. That fact that both these events are real, about real people interacting with Jesus, and are not just stories made up to illustrate a point, makes them even more compelling. Today's event begins simply enough; Jesus and his disciples are passing by a blind man and his presence causes one of the disciples to ask Jesus a penetrating question, '*Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?*' Jesus says neither; *he was born blind so that God's work might be revealed in him.* Then Jesus says a curious thing. He says **we** must work the works of him who sent me.... Jesus is including his disciples in 'his work', and then he declares himself to be *the light of the world.* The blind man is about to be led into that light.

Jesus made mud from earth and spittle, rubbed it on the man's eyes and instructed him to go wash in the pool of Siloam. Remarkably (which shows just how compelling Jesus' words are) the man *went, washed, and came back able to see.* However, Jesus and his disciples have moved on and the man is met by neighbours who have difficulty believing that this is the same man they knew as blind. Now we get to see the man's faith grow.

He tells them more than once, '*I am the man.*', and persists in saying that Jesus, whom he calls 'the man called Jesus', was responsible for him getting his sight although he does not know where Jesus is. In the face of this dilemma, they take him to the Pharisees (think religious leaders, for us, probably the clergy) who want explanation of what had happened. When they learn that Jesus had made mud, they get distracted from the man getting his sight to the fact that this act of Jesus was a violation of the Sabbath. Some decide that Jesus cannot be from God while others are not so sure. '*How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?*' When they ask the man what he thinks about Jesus he replies, '*he is a prophet.*' In the man's eyes Jesus has gone from being 'the man called Jesus' to being a prophet. Even in the face of the doubts of his neighbours and the hostility of the Pharisees, he is being drawn deeper into the world of Jesus while the Pharisees in their stubbornness are moving further away.

The Pharisees persist and try to get his parents to deny that he ever was blind (*Is this your son, who you say was born blind?*) Having no success with them, they turn their attention back to the man, and try to have him agree with them that Jesus is a sinner. Instead he simply says that once he was blind but now he sees. Still under pressure to deny Jesus the man asks them, '*Do you also want to become his disciples?*' Notice the word **also**; he is professing that he is a disciple of Jesus; he has become a follower, not

just the recipient of a miracle. He has taken another step, and the amazing thing is he has not yet had the opportunity to physically see Jesus; he is 'seeing' him through the eyes of faith. He then challenges the Pharisees on their own turf, as it were. He responds to their insistence that Jesus is a sinner – *We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.* Jesus has gone from 'the man Jesus' to being 'a prophet' to a person 'from God' He is decidedly supportive of Jesus; he is ready for the final step.

This happens when Jesus seeks him out (Jesus is always seeking us as well), and asks if he believes *in the Son of Man* (understood to be the Messiah)? The man says that he does not know this Son of Man and asks who he is so that he might believe in him. He so trusts Jesus that he will accept whatever Jesus says to him. Then the climax, as with the Samaritan woman – *Jesus says, you have seen him, and the one speaking to you is he.* And the man's wonderful response, "*Lord, I believe.*" How much more wonderful could it get?

So it is with us. We, too, are on a journey of faith, a journey that undoubtedly has many steps, but we know that Jesus invites us to see him as *the light of the world*, and to let the light that is Jesus illumine our way. We let Jesus illumine our minds, our hearts and our souls so that when we think, feel and love we do so in imitation of Jesus. We let that same light shine on our external actions and our relationships; we invite Jesus to be an intimate part of our lives. So as we continue our Lenten observances of prayer, fasting and charity we seek to be like Jesus, making our lives say with the man born blind, "Lord, I believe."

On another note, continue to pray that God bless all those dealing with the pandemic: that those affected by the virus receive the care they need, that health care workers be compassionate and safe, that those who suffer from loss of income, etc., receive the support they need, and that the researches' work be blessed with the discovery of a vaccine that will conquer this pestilence. So pray, pray, pray, and then pray some more. May God bless all of you.

Fr. Charlie Broderick