

Sight is yours because of Jesus Christ, the Light of the world. Amen.

Isn't it amazing, that in today's Gospel, the only person who sees things clearly is a blind-from-birth beggar?

As [Jesus] went along, he saw a man blind from birth (9:1). Unlike so many others, this blind man is not looking for Jesus. He doesn't cry out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me" (Mark 10:47). No, he just sits there, and Jesus sees him.

So do the disciples ... sort of. **"Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (9:2).** The disciples don't really see the man himself, only a question about whose sin caused his blindness. Because the disciples blindly assume that this man or his parents are especially sinful, they are blind to this opportunity for Jesus to shine.

Can you blame them? A natural response to human suffering is to wonder why it happened, and how you can keep it from happening to you. Still to this day, there's this notion that suffering is the result of God punishing people for some specific, terrible sin.

So Jesus uses this blind man to **shine his light so we can see: "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him" (9:3).**

It is true that suffering is a result of sin (Genesis 3:16-19). It is also true that sometimes specific sufferings are the result of specific sins. But that is not always the case. Sometimes – like this time – there is no specific sin as a cause; suffering is just one way that sin's curse shows itself.

But Christ has come to reverse the curse of sin. So this man is born blind and is in just the right place at just the right time so that Jesus can use his life to display the works of God: **"As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵While I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (9:4-5).**

The Light of the World is all about shining light in dark places. To demonstrate that, he does this: **He spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. ⁷"Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means "Sent"). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing (9:6-7).**

Jesus shines so the blind can see. See! All the things that he had only ever felt or heard: water, sunlight, buildings, people – all of it! What is otherwise impossible, Jesus simply does. But Jesus is not done yet. In fact, Jesus is just getting started. There is more work of God to display in this man's life.

Obviously this healing causes a stir. People want to know how this born-blind-beggar can see, so they take him to the Pharisees for questioning **(9:13)**. The Pharisees are the religious leaders, the guys who know the Old Testament from back to front, who should absolutely recognize Jesus as the Savior sent from God. One of the prophecies about the Savior is that he will give sight to the blind (Isaiah 35:5)!

But there's a problem: **The day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath (9:14).** Saturday, the seventh day of the week, is the day that God commanded his people to do no work (Exodus 20:8-11). The Pharisees are all about the Sabbath. They made up thirty-nine laws of their own, just to avoid work on that day. One of those thirty-nine laws forbids forming clay. Their word for clay is exactly the same as the word for the mud that Jesus makes.

So, why do you suppose Jesus heals this man in such a strange way? He can heal people with a touch, or a word from miles away. But here, he works – spitting, bending, forming, smearing. Does Jesus have a flair for the dramatic? Or does he know that his Sabbath-day mud-making will lead the once-blind man to the spiritually blind Pharisees?

Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others asked, "How can a sinner perform such signs?" So they were divided (9:16). Their blindness is absurd. Standing right before their eyes is a blind-from-birth beggar who is now seeing, whose story is impossible to contradict (9:18-33), but in spite of the evidence, they remain blind.

They turned again to the blind man, "What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened." The man replied, "He is a prophet" (9:17). He gives the obvious explanation to the day's events, but he is the only one who sees it.

To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out (9:34). In the end, they are blind to their own blindness. They sputter out their rage – obviously this man was born entirely in sin – and they throw him out.

How can they be so blind? Because we all are, blind by nature. The Pharisees are a pretty good example of the natural human condition. Their blindness is not lack of vision; it is lack of faith. Not physical, but spiritual.

We are all steeped in sin at birth (Genesis 8:21). Not only have I sinned, not only have you sinned, your parents sinned, and their parents and their parents all the way back to our first parents where this sin business began (Genesis 3:6). Sin is a hereditary condition (John 3:6). We are all born spiritually blind.

So, how clearly do you see? Be careful how you answer. Many people think that they see everything clearly, but in reality, they misjudge almost everything. They are blind to their own blindness.

And it is so easy to fall into the trap of thinking that your confirmation and your church attendance and your upbringing mean that your vision is crystal clear. Like the Pharisees, you can see sin of others, and be blind to the sin in yourself. You can be exactly like Isaiah describes ancient Israel: "You have seen many things, but have paid no attention" (Isaiah 42:20).

Far better than being blind to your own blindness is to stand before Jesus and admit it, like this man. **Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" (9:35)**

Once again, this man is not looking for Jesus, and once again Jesus goes looking for him, because Jesus never abandons you to your blindness. Jesus asks, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" And the man confesses his blindness: **"Who is he, sir? Tell me so that I may believe in him" (9:36).**

Here's the best part. Jesus says: **"You have now seen him"** – you're looking at him, and you were blind a few hours ago! – **"in fact, he is the one speaking with you."** **Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him (9:37-38).**

This man, who begins the day not seeing, now ends the day as the one who sees most clearly. This man believes, but the Pharisees stay blind. Jesus sums up the whole thing like this: **"For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind" (9:39).**

Jesus gives sight to those who know they are spiritually blind. But anyone who claims spiritual sight apart from him will be blinded. **Jesus shines so the blind can see**, and if you remain in the dark you have only yourself to blame (John 3:19).

Yet Jesus does not abandon this man to his blindness, and he does not abandon you either. Do you see how this man's story is kinda-sorta-like your story? You were born into this world with eyes blindly shut, unable to see Jesus. And even though you weren't looking for him, Jesus came and found you.

He is the Son of Man, who has one purpose: to seek and to save the lost from the blindness of sin and for the light of everlasting life (Luke 19:10). About him the question "Who sinned?" is never fitting (Hebrews 4:15). Apart from him "Who sinned?" absolutely fits us all (Romans 3:23). But the Son of Man takes your sin, gives his life for it (Matthew 20:28), and opens your eyes so you can see.

How did he do it? For this man he rubs some mud on his eyes. That seems like an odd way for Jesus to work, right? But it is completely in character with the way that God does things. God loves to attach power to weakness (1 Corinthians 1:25). Smearing mud on someone's eyes doesn't look impressive, until it gives him sight.

How did Jesus give you the sight of faith? Pouring water on someone's head and saying, "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" doesn't look like much, but God promises that in baptism he washes away sin, delivers from death and the devil and gives eternal salvation.

Sharing a few Bible passages with someone doesn't seem like it will make much of a difference, but God promises that the gospel brings you out of the darkness and into the light (Romans 1:16).

God loves to attach his power to weakness, and that is exactly how Jesus saved you. You heard the Apostle Paul: "You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord" (Ephesians 5:8). **Jesus shines so you can see.** Today, you have seen your Savior. Today you once again go home seeing. Happy Lent. Amen.