

The Rev. Daren J. Zehnle
Annunciation Parish, Shumway, Illinois
2 March 2008

The Fourth Sunday of Lent (A)
Laetare Sunday

Leaving the temple, Jesus "saw a man blind from birth" as he walked by him (John 9:1). The encounter between Jesus and the blind man, though, was not a mere coincidence, for "so intently did Jesus look at him that even his disciples noticed it," who so often did not notice very much.¹

This man was not looking for Jesus, he was not crying out to him like the blind man, Bartimaeus; rather, the blind man before us today was completely unaware that his Lord and God stood before him. In this way, he is not very different from each of us.

Jesus - uninvited and even unannounced - approached the man and "spat on the ground and made clay with saliva, and smeared the clay on his eyes" (John 9:6). This seems a very vulgar thing to do, yet we know that Jesus is not a vulgar man and that he does not act without purpose or meaning? Why, then, did he make mud with his spit?

Think back to Ash Wednesday. Then we were reminded that "the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed

¹ Saint John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of John* 56.1. In *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament vol. Iva, John 1-10*. Joel C. Elowsky, ed. (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 2006), 320.

into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Genesis 2:7). By using the dust of the earth Jesus "was making clear to those who can understand, that this was the [same] hand of God through which man was formed from clay."²

Even so, why did Jesus not just pat the dirt in the man's eyes? Why did he spit to make the mud? Surely there was water nearby. The man could even have made the mud himself since Jesus told him, "Go to Siloam and wash" (John 9:7).

Too often we are tempted to ascribe divine happenings to some physical reason. "In order, therefore, that nothing might be ascribed to the fountain [at Siloam] but that you might learn that the power proceeds from his mouth - the same, both formed and opened the man's eyes - he 'spat on the ground.' ...And then, so that you might not think that it was the earth that healed him, he commanded him to wash."³ All of this was done to show that Jesus is the Creator and that he has come to restore and re-create his Creation fallen in sin.

After having washed the mud from his eyes, the man - whose name is never given - returns to Jesus, seeing.

Let us now consider ourselves in light of this man. This man, at first, does not seek Jesus; rather it is Jesus who seeks him. How often do we fail to see Jesus standing before us? Too

² Saint Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, 5.15.2. In *Ibid.*, 324.

³ Saint John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of John* 57.1. In *Ibid.*, 325.

often do we sit by the wayside as Jesus passes by us! Too often do we fail to see him or hear him when he approaches us and speaks to us! Too often do we fail to return to him when we do hear him! Too often do we fail even to look for him or to listen for him!

So very often each day we do not "live as children of light," but as children of darkness (Ephesians 5:8). The Apostle urges us:

Let us then throw off the works of darkness [and] put on the armor of light; let us conduct ourselves properly as in the day, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in promiscuity and licentiousness, not in rivalry and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the desires of the flesh (Romans 13:12-14).

Is this not the purpose of Lent, to throw off the works of darkness which keep us blinded in sin?

Saint Paul reminds us: "You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord" (Ephesians 5:8). What does he mean?

Each baptized member of the Church is a member of the *Illuminati*, the Enlightened Ones, because in Baptism we are enlightened by Christ himself who is "the light of the world" (John 8:12).

As the baptismal candle is lit from the Paschal Candle, from the light of Christ, the priest or deacon says:

[T]his light is entrusted to you to be kept burning brightly. This child of yours has been enlightened by Christ. He is to walk always as a child of the light. May he keep the flame of faith alive in his heart. When the

Lord comes, may he go out to meet him with all the saints in the heavenly kingdom.⁴

I ask you, then, is the flame of faith alive in your heart? Have you allowed the light of Christ to be dimmed or extinguished by your sin? Now is the time to fan that flame into fire and to drink of the waters that flow from his side!

Hear the cry of Saint Paul: "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light" (Ephesians 5:14)!

The man born blind was not looking for Jesus yet he did as he commanded him and without questioning him. Having followed the Savior's commands his blindness - both physical and spiritual - was removed and he was created anew by the hand of God.

Do you wish the same for yourself? What is it that the Savior commands of us? He comes among us, proclaiming, "Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15).

In order to cast off the works of darkness and be created anew we must "expose" the works of darkness in the Sacrament of Penance (Ephesians 5:11). As the Lord Jesus looked for the blind man outside the temple, so he looks for you in the confessional. Will you keep him waiting?

There is nothing to fear in the Lord Jesus for everyone who comes to him seeking forgiveness will receive it, having

⁴ *Rite of Baptism for Children*, 100.

sincerely repented of their sin. In this great sacrament of mercy, the Lord longs to reach out and touch you, to remove your blindness, so that you might walk in "the light of life" (John 8:12). Will you not do as he says?

"You, too, should come to Siloam, that is, to him who was sent by the Father... Let Christ wash you, and you will see.. [I]t is time; come quickly, and you too will be able to say, 'I went and washed'; you will be able to say, 'I was blind, and now I can see.' And, as the blind man said when his eyes began to receive the light, you too can say, 'The night is almost over and the day is at hand.'" Amen.⁵

⁵ Saint Ambrose, *Letter 67.6*. In *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, 326.