



On the Sunday of the Man Born Blind

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

On this Sunday, that before the Feast of the Ascension of Christ, the Church recalls to our attention the Gospel of the man born blind. There are two points here that I would particularly like to remark on.

Firstly, the words of Christ about why the man was born blind. Replying to His disciples, He says that his blindness was not because the man sinned, or his parents, but so that the works of God be made manifest in him. In other words, according to our Lord Himself, illness or handicap do not always occur on account of personal sin or the sin of others, but they may be providentially allowed for the glory of God to shine forth.

We can see this in the lives of some disadvantaged people. They find their disadvantage to be a challenge, a challenge that may bring out the best in them. We can think for example of certain Downs Syndrome children who are unbelievably kind and loving, far more so than if they had been born 'normal'. We can also think of some blind people who, having lost one sense, have refined another sense almost to perfection, and show an understanding of the inner self that the sighted do not have. We can all think of examples of incredible courage and love among disadvantaged people. Why? Because the grace of God is upon them: 'the works of God are made manifest in them'.

On the other hand, we can also think of people with great 'advantages'. For instance, there are extremely beautiful women or very wealthy men who are quite unable to find wedded happiness. They are rather surrounded by those who have no interest in them as people, but only wish to take base advantage of their skin-deep looks or their bank accounts. We can also think of particularly intelligent and educated people, whose intelligence has 'gone to their heads', and they have become extraordinarily pretentious and silly, laughing-stocks before the face of the world. Thus their advantages become their greatest handicaps, hindrances to any sort of happiness.



Healing of the Blind Man by DUCCIO DI BUONINSEGNA

In the case of the man born blind, all his life had been but a preparation for his meeting with Christ. Not only was his soul pure enough, refined by his lifelong handicap, to receive healing from the Lord, but also he confessed Him as the Son of God, thus making the works of God manifest in himself.

Firstly, the Pharisees, who were truly blind because they forbade healing and good works on the Sabbath, questioned him and intimidated him and his parents and then cast him out. And he witnessed to them that, 'I know not whether Jesus be a sinner or not; one thing I know; I was blind, now I see'.

Secondly, he added: 'If He were not of God, he could do nothing'.

And finally he confessed that he believed that Christ is the Son of God – one of the first in the Gospels to do so.

The judgement of the man born blind was then sound. He can teach us how to judge, or rather discern, others – by their fruits. If we, or others, are of God, then we shall last and bear good fruit, for if any is not of God, he can do nothing. And if any is of God, then he will finish by bearing witness to the Divinity of



Christ.

The second thing that we should notice in today's Gospel is the way in which Christ healed. He spat on the earth and 'made clay of the spittle'. We note this for every sacrament of the Church heals in the selfsame manner:

Clay cannot heal the blind and yet with the breath of God, it becomes the container for the healing grace of God.

Water cannot heal and yet the water of baptism heals because the blessed water bears the Holy Spirit.

Oil cannot heal and yet the oil of chrismation and unction heal because they are filled with the grace of God.

A piece of cloth cannot heal and yet a priest's stole can heal through the grace of Christ at the sincere confession of sins and the repentant intention not to sin again.

Bread and wine cannot heal and yet bread and wine transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ heal through the Holy Spirit.

Wood and paint cannot heal and yet icons can heal by the Holy Spirit Who penetrates into their material essence and radiates grace from them.

Smoke cannot heal and yet incense burnt brings healing through the blessing of Christ.

Christ teaches us then that all things can be used for our healing and benefit and salvation, but that they must first be touched by His grace.

In this way our bodies, mere flesh and bones and blood, can become containers of Christ. Our souls activated, we can become lamps of the Holy Spirit; the eyes of our souls, the doors of perception, become seeing, and we see the whole of God's Creation as it really is. We see that every blade of grass and every hill, every tree and every cloud, every drop of rain and every ocean, all creatures and all people, are miracles of God's handiwork, signs of His sacramental presence among us, and we see that we live not in the banal, everyday world, but in potential Paradise, the world as it really is, as God made it first, for we see God the Creator behind all things and all people.

And then we too, together with the man born blind, can say:

'I was blind, now I see'.

Amen.

Source: [Orthodox England](#)