

The Perils of Christian Testimony

(The Man Born Blind)

4th Sunday of Lent - Year A

1 Samuel 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a
Psalms 23:1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6 (1)

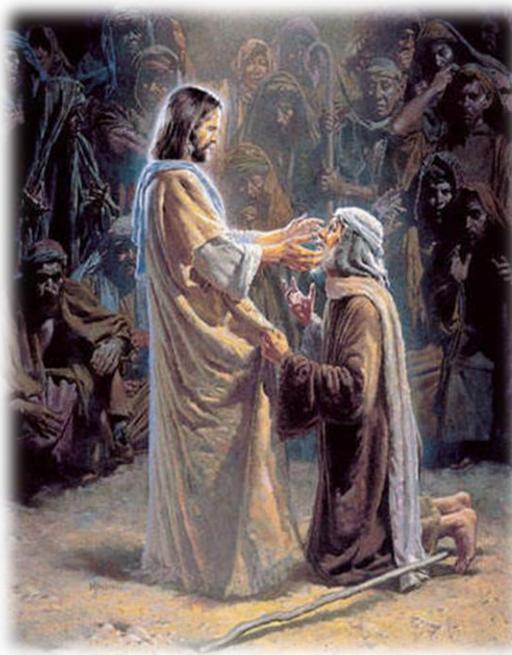
Ephesians 5:8-14
John 9:1-41

If you've heard one story of Jesus curing a blind man you've pretty much heard them all, whether it be of Jesus smearing mud paste, simply touching the man's eyes, whether the man cries out to the "Son of David" or first experiences his cure by seeing people who look like "walking trees", after which Jesus sternly orders them to tell no one. In the Gospel of John, however, the Man Born Blind never asks for a cure, nor does he seek out or engage Jesus in any way. Rather, it is Jesus who notices the Man Born Blind, and Jesus alone who takes the initiative.

Yet, for the Man Born Blind there is no order to say nothing to anyone. Rather, this encounter with Jesus, who quickly disappears from the scene, an encounter that results in the acquiring of sight, is but the beginning of an elongated ordeal in which the Man Born Blind is thrust into an interrogation where, alone and unaided, he must make his own sense of what just happened, demonstrating to his hostile

interrogators that he had been given far more than mere physical sight.

Upon being cured, indeed from the moment he is told to wash at the pool of Siloam, the Man Born Blind is abandoned by the one who cured him to answer for both the encounter and the cure. From the beginning he is presumed to be "steeped in sin" from birth, hence his life-long blindness. Over the process of the interrogation he is abandoned by his parents who deflect all questions to their son, denounced by the Pharisees who reject his answers, and



physically expelled from the premises by those who are offended by his "lectures". Yet, throughout, he exercises a deeper insight into who had cured him, and what power was behind the cure; conclusions drawn from his personal encounter, built upon a general knowledge of the ways of God as revealed through the written scriptures of his faith, and incorporating simple, basic logic; conclusions that confounded his interrogators, refuted

The Man Born Blind

accusations against Jesus, and demonstrated a deeper spiritual "sight" into the identity of a man he had only briefly met, and to this point had never even seen with his own, now cured, eyes.

In the end the Man Born Blind, who previously had been well known, and an apparent fixture to the locals, sits alone and ostracized, the direct result of the unsolicited actions of Jesus. Only then does Jesus return to the scene, asking the Man Born Blind a simple question, an understatement considering what the Man had just endured, but a profound one touching upon the basic call of all who are to follow Him - *"Do you believe in the Son of Man?"*

The story of the Man Born Blind is not just another story of Jesus and his miracles. The subsequent Testimony that the Man is compelled to give in the aftermath makes this story stand out among other miraculous cures. The story

demonstrates how an encounter with Jesus, even an *unsolicited* one, is never an event in and of itself. When we, or anyone else, encounter the saving action of Christ, or receive His sanctifying grace in and through the sacramental life of the Church, it is never "one-sided". In the outlook of John

*every encounter with
Jesus, every cure, every
occasion in which one
receives the grace and
goodness of the Messiah,
includes a corresponding
witness that must be given*

the Evangelist, as expressed in the miracle of the Man Born Blind, every encounter with Jesus, every cure, every occasion in which one receives the grace and goodness of the Messiah, includes a corresponding witness that must be given; evangelization, even in the midst of hostility, that makes known the mystery of Jesus

identity as Messiah, and His saving, sanctifying and healing action. It is through this testimony that we authentically and substantially answer the same question put to us - "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

Fr. Bill Nicholas
March 23, 2017