

**Homily for March 10, 2002  
4th Sunday of Lent Cycle A**

**By Father Charles Bowes**

**Samuel 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a  
Ephesians 5:8-14  
John 9:1-41**

## *We invite God to heal our blindness through Jesus Christ.*

“If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you are saying, ‘we see,’ so your sin remains.”

There is only one sin in Saint John’s gospel, but it is a fatal flaw: the sin of unbelief. If you have faith, according to Saint John’s gospel, nothing can harm you, and no element of your life can take away your claim to salvation. Even the traditionally accepted signs of being tainted by sin such as sickness and disability – these have no hold on you. Faith is the cure-all for the human condition, because it is the lack of faith in God that got us into the sin business to start with.

The religious leaders portrayed in John chapter 9 clearly do not know this. Even though Jesus dismisses the idea that the man born blind bears the legacy of someone’s sin, the leaders insist that the man is “steeped in sin since birth” as they throw him out of the synagogue. In their blindness, they see sin everywhere: in the man’s initial blindness, in his later cure on the Sabbath, and in Jesus most of all for performing the miracle in the first place. These morality police chase all the wrong demons, never recognizing the real danger in their own hearts, the refusal to believe in the goodness of God in the most unexpected and unlikely of places.

It was a common belief at the time of Jesus that illness was a sign of sinfulness. Consequently, even to touch a person who was unclean or ill was somehow to be tainted. But Jesus dismisses such a thing. And in so doing he puts himself at odds with the powers that be. The story is a remarkable one because gradually the man who was blind is able to recognize Jesus – come to faith – and those who were able to “see” become increasingly blind – unable to recognize God in the most unlikely of places: illness, blindness, disability.

As I reflect on this gospel for it to become salvific to me, and hopefully for you as well, I ask myself this question: is there any situation or condition in which I cannot imagine the presence of God? To the extent that I cannot, I am blind. As I look at my life over these past so many months, the haunting images of the destruction of the World Trade Centers come to mind – I honestly can’t see God in that. But very likely that is my blindness that needs healing. So my prayer to God through Jesus might look something like this: “Lord, how did you come to see the presence of your Father in what was taboo in your age? How did you come to see God in sickness and infirmity and in brutality and in all that was poor? Lord, How did you come to see God in the criminal and in the prostitute?”

Another image which comes to mind, and in which I find great difficulty in seeing the hand of God, is in the sexual abuse cases in the Archdiocese of Boston. I am blind with respect to seeing God in that, and I need healing there. What about you? Do you have fears or situations or conditions where you absolutely cannot see God at work? Maybe it's a relationship or a job or a debilitating illness? Our prayer to God through Jesus might be the same: "Lord, how were you ever able to see your Father's hand at work in these places?"

As I contemplate these questions I'm also struck by the fact that our Christian belief that God can be at work where at first we do not recognize God may well entail rejection by others in our society – perhaps by members of our own families. For blindness to the presence of God is not simply a private matter. Rather, we are really up against social prejudices and hardened cultural obsessions. That's evil and that's what the Lord comes to redeem.

This coming Tuesday evening at 7:00 p.m. we'll have the opportunity for our communal reconciliation service – perhaps blindness and its healing may be the very thing of which we are most in need this holy season.

There's an old allegory which was written for children to help them understand the nature of God's light. It also speaks to grownups, I think: Once upon a time a Cave lived under the ground, as caves have the habit of doing. The Cave had spent its lifetime in darkness. One day it heard a voice calling to it: "Come up into the light; come and see the sunshine." The Cave retorted, "I don't know what you mean; there isn't anything but darkness." Finally, the Cave ventured forth and was surprised to see light everywhere. Looking up to the Sun, the Cave said, "Come with me and see the

darkness." The Sun asked, "What is darkness?" The Cave replied, "Come and see." One day the Sun accepted the invitation. As it entered the Cave, it said, "Now show me your darkness." But there was no darkness.

Let us pray this ancient Gaelic prayer: "As the rain hides the stars, as the autumn mist hides the hills, as the dark clouds veil the blue of the sky, so the dark happenings of my life hide the shining of Thy face from me, O God. Yet if I may hold Thy hand in the darkness, it is enough. Even though I may stumble in the going, Thou dost not fall. Thou dost not fall."

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