

SEEING IN THE DARK: 4TH SUNDAY OF LENT (A)

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You and I belong to a Christian community of stories and storytellers. In the telling of the stories of Jesus especially, our own stories are told. As we identify with the people in those stories, with their distress, anger, anxiety, hopes, fears, struggles, sadness and joy, we too make living contact with our Saviour. We are challenged by his words, supported by his love, and healed by his touch.

Today's gospel reading is the story of Jesus the Light of the World. It is the story too of the blind man. It is our story too. Three stories are interwoven and interconnected.

The blind man has lived in a world of darkness from the day he was born. He has never seen his room, his table, his chair, his bed, his door. He has never seen flowers, or trees, or children. He has never seen anyone or anything. Besides, he is poor and without any means of support. With nothing like an invalid pension to ease his distress, he is reduced to begging in the streets. His struggle for survival is aggravated by abuse, insults and contempt from others.

Leading lights in his town are baiting him with their ignorant accusation: '*Your blindness was caused by your sins.*' Even after his blindness is plainly cured they keep up their sneers: '*What you allege just didn't happen. This Jesus fellow is a sinner. Sinners can't cure people. Anyway, you weren't blind in the first place.*'

All through his ordeal the patient sufferer never loses his cool, and replies to every accusation with the unvarnished truth. And through it all he grows in his appreciation of the greatness of the one who helps and heals him.

At first he sees in Jesus a man with special powers, one who can smear mud on a blind person's eyes and make the sufferer see again. Next he comes to see that Jesus is a prophet, a messenger of God. Finally he recognises Jesus as his Lord and King, and bows down and worships him.

As the blind man's story unravels bit by bit, the story of the greatness of Jesus is also told. He speaks and acts as the light shining in the darkness, one which will never be put out. He repudiates the prejudice that physical blindness is caused by sin. He speaks of getting on with God's healing work while there is daylight left to do it. He sees the urgency of the blind man's plight and goes to the rescue immediately. He ignores the ignorant and foolish chatter of his enemies. And when the man he delivers from blindness is expelled from the synagogue, Jesus seeks him out and empowers him to develop a more lively faith, a surer hope and a deeper love.

Where do we find our own story in all this? For each of us, old, middle-aged, or young, the blind man's story is the story of our becoming Christians, by means of both faith and baptism. In the early days of the Church, when people were baptised as adults rather than children,

baptism had the name '*The Enlightenment*'. At our baptism, the priest lit a candle from the Easter Candle, symbol of the Risen Lord, and handing it to our father or godfather for us, said: '*Receive the light of Christ.*'

Even as the story of the blind man's enlightenment shows us the influence of Jesus on the blind man's honesty, courage, determination, faith, hope and love, it also shows us what it means to '*walk always as a child of the light*' (*Rite of Baptism*). It means nothing less than seeing, feeling, judging and acting, as Jesus himself has done. It means asking that WWJD question: '*What would Jesus do?*'

In Peter Shaeffer's play *Equus*, the psychiatrist remarks: '*I need a way of seeing in the dark.*' In today's gospel reading, St John leaves us in no doubt that Jesus is that way. We are hopelessly blind if we think that we've got life all figured out, or that we've got it all together, and that we don't need Christ to enlighten us and show us a purer, better, more genuine and more generous way of living.

In the light of the gospel today, each of us might surely want to say to Christ: '*Lord Jesus, how much blindness is there still left in me? How much selfishness do I still display? How much insensitivity, how much prejudice, how much snobbery, how much self-righteousness, how much hypocrisy, how much pride, how much contempt for others? Lord Jesus, just how many blind spots do I have?*' And each of us might want to pray three famous short prayers: - 1. '*Lord Jesus, give us the grace to see ourselves as others see us.*' 2. '*Lord, that I may see, Lord, that I may see.*' And 3. '*Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word, and my soul shall be healed.*'