

Lectio Divina – 4th Sunday of Lent - Year A

Contexts

John's Gospel (in brief)

- **Structure of John's Gospel**
 - 1:1-18: Prologue** – An introduction to and summary of the career of the incarnate Word.
 - 1:19-12:50: Part One: The Book of Signs:** the Word reveals himself to the world and to his own, but they do not accept him.
 - Chapter 6** – Jesus, the Bread of Life is right in the middle of The Book of Signs – a central text in more ways than one!
 - 13:1-20:31: Part Two: The Book of Glory:** To those who accept him, the Word shows his glory by returning to the Father in death, resurrection and ascension. Fully glorified, he communicates the Spirit of life.
 - 21:1-25: Epilogue:** Galilean resurrection appearances and second conclusion.
- It is the only Gospel to call Jesus "God".
- Purpose of Gospel is so that those who follow Jesus might have the kind of faith that would give them eternal life, namely, the faith that Jesus was God's only Son, possessing God's own life and had come into the world from above that people might be given that life (and thus be begotten by God) and become God's children. (Raymond Brown SS)
- Jesus is 'The Bread of Life' who feeds, nourishes and sustains the children of God.

John 9:1-41: things to notice

- This episode comes from the Book of Signs in which Jesus is portrayed as revealing himself to the world and experiencing rejection and hostility or false-adulation. John deliberately calls various miracles of Jesus 'signs' so that his audience can see the deeper reality behind the works that Jesus does. Remember that John has very carefully created these stories to communicate the truth about Jesus. Each of the characters (as in last week's Gospel) has a part to play in the unfolding drama of John's story.
- As the story begins Jesus sees a 'man who had been blind from birth'. The man has never seen and does not know what light is. He has never experienced it. His world is total darkness.
- The disciples ask the question about who was responsible for the man being born blind – he or his parents. This was a common thought in the time of Jesus – that physical illness or disability was the result of someone's personal sin.
- Jesus tells them that neither the man or his parents sinned. The man was born blind so that the glory of God could be displayed in him (through his healing and testimony to the truth about Jesus).
- Jesus next makes a statement about light and darkness and his mission to work as long 'as the day lasts' (ie, as long as there is light). Night will come and with it the time for Jesus to depart. The statement ends with Jesus' declaration that 'I am the light of the world'.
- Unbidden, (there is no request for healing; it is Jesus' own initiative) Jesus then does an extraordinary thing. Rather than giving a solemn pronouncement of healing, he spits on the ground, makes a paste and rubs it over the eyes of the blind man. This is a deeply personal, intimate and confronting thing to do. I wonder how the blind man may have felt about that? How might we have reacted if that had happened to us?
- Jesus tells the man to wash in the Pool of Siloam (a pool used for ritual bathing among the Jews) which he does and can now see. Note, 'with his sight restored' is a really bad translation of 'and came back seeing.' As we know, the man was born

blind. He never lost his sight because he never had it in the first place. The drama in this sign is that the man who has lived his whole life in darkness now sees.

- The scene shifts to the neighbours and others who know the man. There is some confusion about whether or not he is the same man. The man himself gives his first witness: 'I am the man'. But there is no mention that the news of the man's cure brought rejoicing, celebration or welcome – only questions, doubts and suspicion.
- So they ask him to explain how he can now see. The man gives his second testimony, about what happened and who healed him. He has heard it was Jesus who healed him but he doesn't know where Jesus is.
- Next they take him to the religious authorities, the Pharisees, (probably at the Temple) who also question the man.
- What follows is a powerfully told dialogue in which the 'sighted ones' prove themselves to be in the darkness. The Pharisees, through constant doubt and legal objection, show themselves unable to enter into the work of God.
- The Pharisees maintain that Jesus cannot be from God (one of the centre assertions in John's Gospel) because he (maybe) healed the man on the sabbath by making the paste. They class Jesus among the 'sinners', but others ask, '(But) how could a sinner produce a sign like this?'
- The man offers his third testimony, that Jesus is a prophet.
- Next the Pharisees send for the man's parents to give testimony about who he is and the fact that he had been blind from birth. The parents verify his identity and that he has never seen but refuse to be drawn into the argument about how he now sees and who may have been responsible. 'He is old enough; let him speak for himself,' they say.
- Next the Pharisees bring the man back in. Now he gives his fourth testimony. Notice what takes place in the dialogue between the man and the Pharisees. The man's witness is clear, strong and bold. Like the Samaritan women, he is no pushover, either! He ends up giving the Pharisees a lesson about the action of God. His argument is very clever. The Pharisees are affronted and drive him away.
- Jesus goes looking for the man and reveals himself as the Son of Man (note: not Son of God). This title is found in a vision in the OT Book of Daniel as well as Ezekiel and the Book of Numbers. It is used frequently in the Gospels and other early Christian writings. No one seems to know just how that happened, but what we do know is that the early Church used this title frequently for Jesus.
- The man asks where this Son of Man is so that he can believe. That suggests that *seeing* the Son of Man is integral to the man's belief in him – seeing is believing!
- When Jesus reveals himself the man *worships him* – a classic act of belief. Notice the change of the man's form of address to Jesus from 'Sir' to 'Lord'.
- Final words: the judgement of (relationship with) Jesus turns everything upside down: the blind see and those who see and really blind.
- Note than in the last couple of sentences 'guilty' and 'guilt' are terrible mistranslations of 'sin' – remembering especially that sin in John's Gospel is disbelief.

The Liturgical Context – why does the church choose this passage to reflect on this Sunday?

The Sunday Lenten Gospels

	First Reading	Second Reading	Gospel
1 st Sunday	Genesis 2:7-9, 3:1-7 Creation & Fall	Romans 5:12-19 Sin and Grace	Mt 4:1-11 Temptations
2 nd Sunday	Genesis 12:1-4 The call of Abraham	2 Timothy 1:8-10 Our call to holiness	Mt 17:1-9 Transfiguration

3 rd Sunday	Exodus 17:3-7 Israel's water of despair	Romans 5:1-2, 5-8 God's love poured into us	John 4:5-42 Samaritan Woman [Living Water]
4th Sunday	1 Samuel 16:1,6-7,10-13 Anointing of David	Ephesians 5:8-14 Children of the Light	John 9:1-41 Man born blind [from darkness to Light]
5 th Sunday	Ezekiel 37:12-14 I will put my spirit in you	Romans 8:8-11 The Spirit dwells in you	John 11:1-45 Raising of Lazarus [from death to Life]
Passion	Isaiah 50:4-7 I did not cover my face against insult	Philippians 2:6-11 He humbled himself and God raised him up	Matthew 26:14-27:66 Passion
Easter	Acts 10:34, 37-43 We ate and drank with him	Colossians 3:1-4 Look for the things that are above	John 20:1-9 Jesus risen from the dead

The Great Gospels of Lent

The three great dramas from John's Gospel help us understand that the Christian journey from temptation to transfiguration occurs only in and through Jesus who is living water for the deepest thirst of our human hearts; who draws us out of darkness and into light; who is life itself for those who believe.

"Just as we accompanied the Samaritan woman last week on her journey of faith, so now we are invited to walk with the blind man as he gains not only his physical sight, but the in-sight of faith. By contrast, those who claim to have spiritual sight – the religious authorities – are exposed as being truly blind.

Like the Samaritan woman, the blind man progresses in his discovery of who Jesus is. At first Jesus is simply "a man", then "a prophet", then "Son of Man" and finally "Lord". He also becomes progressively more bold and courageous in his testimony before the authorities. In contrast, they become increasingly blind to the truth." (BOTW)

Reflection

This week we hear the second of the three Great Gospels of Lent. Jesus gives the light of sight to the man born blind. Like the woman at the well in last Sunday's Gospel, the man born blind receives the gift of faith along with his sight. Like the woman at the well, he, too, becomes a witness for Christ, this time before the Pharisees.

The first reading reflects another theme in the Gospel. Faith brings new sight – the ability to see as God sees, to enter into God's vision for life. God, the reading says, looks beyond the physical and into the heart. True sight looks beyond what is seen at first glance and discovers the truth. In the reading the most unlikely person, the youngest son, who is still a boy, is chosen by God to be king.

The second reading also takes up the theme of light and darkness. St Paul tells the Ephesians, "You were darkness once, but now you are light in Christ!" They must be like children of the light, taking no part in the works of darkness, but living always in the light of goodness and truth.

The candles we use in our liturgies remind us of the vitality and life of Christ which has been entrusted to us. With our minds lit and our hearts warmed by the Spirit of Christ we, too,

develop true insight and as God's heart begins to beat within our own, we become light and warmth for each other.

May the light of Christ burn strongly within us!