



Fourth Sunday of Lent



1 Sam. 16:1, 6-7, 10-13a • Eph. 5:8-14 • John 9:1-41

The poet Flavia Weedn penned a verse often quoted on greeting cards:

*Some people come into our lives and quickly go.
Some people come into our lives,
leave footprints on our hearts,
and we are never, ever the same.*

Our Catholic theology teaches that the sacraments are more than merely symbolic actions. They are encounters with Christ. Through the symbols of water, oil, bread and wine, we experience the presence of Christ; the infinite love of God reaches into our finite lives, is poured into our hearts, quenches our deepest thirst, and becomes a fountain of everlasting life. More than mere symbols and rituals, the sacraments are encounters with Christ that change us. Jesus does not merely come into our lives and quickly go. He leaves footprints on our hearts, our minds, our souls—and we are never ever the same.

We don't always recognize the ways that Jesus changes us. As the Gospel story suggests, we are often blind. Today's Gospel is another deeply symbolic story. Like the Woman at the Well, the Man Born Blind isn't given a name, because he symbolizes each one of us. In many ways we are all blind. We may not even know it, but we don't really see clearly. We don't see ourselves clearly. Our self-image is so often clouded by poor self-esteem or an inflated ego; we are blind to our own faults or we exaggerate them; and so often we don't recognize our own gifts and strengths. Nor do we see others clearly. We're blind to our prejudices, our fears and our assumptions. And we don't see God clearly; we think of God as distant, punitive, preoccupied, or demanding. In so many ways we stumble through life like blind beggars, dissatisfied with ourselves, struggling in our relationships with others, and alienated from God. And this is because, in the words of the First Reading, we see as humans see, not as God sees.

The Gospel story shows us what can happen when Jesus walks into our lives. When Jesus encounters the Man Born Blind, he sends him to wash his eyes in the Pool of Siloam—which, the writer tells us, means "Sent." In Greek, the meaning is the same as *Christos*, the One who is sent by God. So the Man washes in Christ—he is baptized—and his eyes are opened; he can see.

And once his eyes are opened, his life is changed. He is not the same person. He is no longer a blind man, no longer a beggar. He sees himself differently. The only problem is, the people around him don't. His former friends continue to see him as the beggar they always knew. The religious leaders continue to see him as a sinner. Even his parents can only see him as the child they had always known, the child who was not able to see. But the Man knows he is not the same. His encounter with Jesus has opened his eyes to a new awareness about himself, and all the challenges and conflicts and arguments cannot take this away. It gives him the ability to stand up to the denials and accusations and insults from his former friends, his family and the religious leaders: "One thing I do know: I was blind and now I see." He sees himself—and others—differently.

But if we read the story closely, he also sees God differently. At the beginning, when he is first questioned about what happened, he says: "The man called Jesus made clay and sent me to wash..." Later, when the religious leaders ask him who he thinks Jesus is, he answers, "He is a prophet." A little later he tells them that Jesus must be the One sent by God. And finally, when Jesus is standing before him, he worships him as Lord. His sight has grown clearer.

The story offers a powerful image of what baptism does for us. It opens our eyes to see as we have never seen before—to see not as humans see, but as God sees. And when we allow our eyes to be opened in this way, we are changed; we are never, ever the same. Our lives may not be changed in the way we want them to be. Notice that when the Man was healed, his life didn't become easy. In fact, his healing led to conflict with his friends and family and faith community. Baptism doesn't wash away our troubles; it opens our eyes. Our perception of life changes. We begin to see that our relationship with God isn't supposed to be a free pass to an easy life, that if we have faith, God will bless us and we won't have problems, suffering or failure. That's the way humans see.

If we allow it, baptism opens our eyes to see Jesus differently. Jesus is not someone who walks into our lives and quickly goes. He walks around in our hearts and minds and souls, and he invites us to walk with him, to follow him. And if we do walk with him, we begin to see that his way is not an easy way; it leads to the cross. But his cross—and the crosses in our own lives, our challenges, our suffering, our failures and sins—are not what define us. The power of God’s love that has been poured into our hearts helps us see beyond the cross to resurrection. The things that we thought held us back, limited and hindered us, become the very things that give us courage, strength and character. They transform us. In fact, they make us holy.

That’s the power of the sacraments that the Elect will celebrate at the Easter Vigil. It’s the power of the Eucharist we celebrate every week, when we renew our encounter with Christ. It opens our eyes to the Real Presence of Christ who makes it possible for us to see as God sees. We come to know that God is fact with us, in the midst of all the challenges of our lives.

As we encounter Christ in these sacraments, may we let him open our eyes. May we let him leave footprints on our hearts so that we will never, ever, be the same.

Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi before a Crucifix

Most high and glorious God,
bring light to the darkness
of my heart.

Give me true faith,
certain hope,
and perfect charity.

Give me insight and wisdom
that I might always discern
your holy and true will.

+ Amen.

For Reflection & Prayer

† In what ways can you say, “I was blind but now I see”? How has your encounter with Jesus changed you life?

† St. James exhorts us to “be doers of the Word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22). What is one thing you can do this week to put the message of this Scripture into action?