

,Homily for the 4<sup>th</sup> Week of Lent

By Deacon Greg McGinn

Read the texts for today before hand: 1Samuel 16:6-7, 10-13; Psalm 23; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41

My NH driver's license is restricted, Code B it reads, for corrective lenses.

On my last annual visit to the optometrist, she informed me that I no longer needed contact lenses or glasses. I wore them every day since I was in high school to correct my near sightedness. I still need glasses for reading but I can get the cheap ones on sale in the pharmacy. And, alas, the optometrist told me that at some point I will need cataract surgery.

Truth is that very nearly every one of us will require glasses, contact lenses or some form of eye surgery to bring our visual acuity closer to 20/20. Compare that to the poor fellow in today's gospel, blind from birth. Try to imagine life in the dark, "pitch" dark we all call it, black as tar. He would never behold a flower bloom, a starry night, spring colors, a sunrise, a sunset, or the face of a loved one, only darkness and with no prospect that life would ever be different.

Along comes "the man called Jesus" and, slowly at first, everything is different. This is an intricately detailed story in which not a single word or detail is wasted.

As Father Bob pointed out last week, this passage has been grouped with the story of the Women at the Well and the Raising of Lazarus as "must reads" for anyone preparing to become a Christian ever since the earliest days of the Church. Think of them as three episodes about what the word *believe* really means. More than just a "Bible trivia," here are few facts to help in understanding John's Gospel. The word *faith* never appears in John's Gospel. Instead the word *belief* or *believe* appears 58 times, nearly double the number of times the word *faith* appears in the other three Gospels combined. In John's Gospel, if the words *see* and *know* are not exactly synonymous with *belief*, they are, at the very least, essential components of *belief*.

Reread this passage and note for yourself that there are no wasted words here.

The story opens when Jesus saw a man born blind from birth. Because Jesus is the "sent one," he knows these sorts of things. Before the miracle cure takes place, Jesus says to his disciples, "We have to do the works of the one who sent me while it is day." And what are "the works"? Just one really: to reveal Jesus for who he really is. This is key to what follows. Like last week's gospel, Jesus begins the action but even more abruptly than "Give me a drink." Without so much as a "Hello, how are you," Jesus smears mud on the man's eyes. Only then does Jesus speak, "Go and wash."

Coming back able to see, is only the beginning. Through a series of encounters with those who see, don't see or refuse to see, and those who know, don't know, or refuse to know, the man born blind is not only able to see, but able to see who Jesus really is. Again, it is Jesus who seeks him out, "Do you believe?" The man born blind replies, "I do believe, Lord," and he

worshipped him. It's a beautiful story for the one born blind, but also a journey with twists and turns, and not an easy path. There is also a warning at the conclusion. Those who refuse to see, to know, or to believe, pronounce a judgment on themselves.

So, what about us, the ones who dare to say, "I do believe"? Even believers have blind spots, prejudices, presuppositions and assumptions we clutch onto. "Go and wash," Jesus said. Perhaps the blind man did as he was told, only to clean the gunk off his face, with no expectation he would come back able to see, or was he really hoping against hope that he would be able to see? Either way, what a surprise, what a joy!

Suppose we look at the circumstances of the past two weeks, when everything that is familiar, is changing and with a growing sense of dread. Suppose we see it as a new command, "Go and wash." Just maybe, we might come back able to see. There is every hope and expectation that human ingenuity will provide some near-term financial relief, and in time, a treatment, a vaccine and maybe even a cure for COVID-19. But something more is needed. And I think we have already seen it happening. We see it in spontaneous, genuine and generous acts of kindness that cleanse our blind spots, our presuppositions and our assumptions. Even in this twilight zone of uncertainty, we see ourselves and others in a new light and live as children of light. While the news reports have shaken us to the core, there are also reports of a growing sense that we're in this together.

Let's not get too far ahead of ourselves. We are left to wonder what's next, when and how will it end. We have been given this unwanted opportunity to take stock. It remains to be seen who will actually "Go and wash" and come back able to see, let alone whether there will be new or renewed, effects that last beyond the end of the crisis.

My prayer for you: The grace to "Go and wash" in order to see your family is a new light, to see your neighbors in a new light, to see your finances in a new light, to see what entertains you in a new light is a new light, to be aware of your blind spots, to be more humble about what we think we know, and to step out of the darkness to see, as the if it was the first time, a flower bloom, a starry night, spring colors, each sunrise and each sunset, the face of a loved one, and to greet the "sent one" who seeks us out with the words, "I do believe, Lord."