

# *FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT*

## *“Blind Man’s Bluff?”*

*John 9:1-7, 13-17, 34-39*

*March 1 / 2, 2008*

I like to play games – all kinds of games – always did, probably always will. One of the games I remember playing when I was a kid was a game called “Blind Man’s Bluff.” Maybe some of you remember playing it too. The idea was for one person to be blindfolded and then try and find the rest of the group. It was fun especially when the “blind man” got “bluffed” in the wrong direction and would bump into things and even fall flat on his or her face. Then, blindness was a game.

Now, I know that blindness isn’t a game. It’s serious business especially for those who are blind. I remember a youth retreat I led at my first parish. Part of the program was devoted to trying to understand the problems of the physically-challenged so that we might minister to them more effectively. To that end, we physically challenged ourselves. Some of us were blindfolded, some of us were confined to wheel chairs, some to crutches, some had to wear earplugs, and some even had their mouths taped shut. And then, for the next few hours, we tried to function as normally as possible during the regularly-scheduled activities of the retreat. It didn’t take any of us very long to discover how difficult it is to function normally in a world of sight and sound and movement and speech when one of those senses is taken away. In fact, none of us were the least bit saddened when the time for the activity ran out and we could be “un-challenged” once again. I think all of us not only learned to be more thankful for the senses we had and often took for granted but we grew in our understanding and appreciation for those who are indeed physically challenged in one way or another as well.

Without a doubt, physical blindness is a challenge and it’s a big one. But even more challenging and even bigger is spiritual blindness – blindness not of the eyes but of the soul – blindness not brought about by birth or by accident but by being a sinner, living apart from God in the darkness of sin. In the end, it “bluffs” us in the wrong direction in life and we end up bumping into things and falling flat on our faces for an eternity and that’s not so funny.

The man in our text for today had lived with physical blindness his whole life. But Jesus, in his grace and mercy, healed him and restored his sight. And now the man could see what he had never seen before. But more than that, he could see Jesus for who he really was and he believed in him and knelt before him and worshiped him.

As we meditate upon what the Lord did in the life of that one man, we pray that we who are suffering from physical illness, disease, or infirmities may be healed too – but even more importantly, we pray that we may be healed spiritually – so that we too may say in

a new and deeper way, “Lord, I believe” and believing, truly worship him in spirit and in truth and seek to live with our eyes firmly fixed on him throughout the coming week.

Now the Bible tells us that one day as Jesus and his disciples were walking along they came upon a man who was blind from birth. The disciples wanted to know whose sin it was – the man’s or his parents – that had caused him to be blind. An interesting question! Now blindness – whether physical or spiritual – is indeed the result of sin, but it’s not caused by any one sin in particular but rather by man’s sinful nature in general. It’s certainly not what God intended in the beginning but it’s the way it is now since the fall. But Jesus’ purpose in coming into the world wasn’t to condemn people for their sin as we heard a couple of weeks ago in John 3 but rather to save them – to heal them, if you will. As he himself said, “this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. As long as it is day, we must do the work of Him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I’m in the world, I am the light of the world.” And with that Jesus spit on the ground and made some mud and put it on the man’s eyes and told him to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. And when the man went, in faith, he was healed. And he could see.

Now, there was no healing power either in the mud or in the waters of Siloam. By themselves they were just ordinary mud and water. The healing power was in Christ and in his Word. And when the man returned from the pool, people who knew him were so amazed that he could now see that they even began to debate among themselves as to whether this was really their former blind friend or not. After assuring them that he was, they took him to the temple to share the good news of this miracle of healing with those who should have really appreciated it – the temple priests.

But the Bible says that the priests were anything but appreciative. You see, they were blind too – but in a different way. They were blind spiritually and they didn’t even recognize what God had done when it was right in front of their eyes. What was to follow, what John recorded in our Gospel lesson, reveals their blindness but it also reveals that the man Jesus healed not only had been given physical sight but spiritual sight as well. For as the Pharisees contended with the man about how it all happened and who really did it – the man was forced to think about it and the more he thought about it the more he focused on Jesus. And the more he focused on Jesus the more he saw what the Pharisees couldn’t or wouldn’t see – that it was God Himself in the person and work of His Son, Jesus Christ, who had healed him, and in that, the light of God’s kingdom dawned in this one man’s life.

In the end the Pharisees were outdone by this one man and so they cast him out of the temple – another way of saying that they excommunicated him because his mere presence was a reminder to them of their own blindness.

You know, our lives and our witness as Christians are not unlike that of this man’s. For Jesus has healed us too. Oh, maybe not of any physical blindness but certainly of spiritual blindness. He has healed us not with mud and spit but with water and the Word and with bread and wine. And now we too are living proof of what God has done in and

through the person and work of His Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ. And the light of His kingdom has dawned in our lives as well. And now, as Paul says in today's epistle lesson, we are called to live as children of the light. In word and deed we too are to walk in the light of Christ day to day. And as we do, we, like that man, may be challenged by those who still live in spiritual blindness as to where our faith and hope lie. But like this man it's in that challenge and in the meeting of that challenge that our faith grows and our light shines all the more brightly to those around us.

Mud and water mixed together and a man can see. But behind it all was Jesus Christ and His Word. The man's eyes were opened and he saw Jesus for who he really was and he believed and worshiped him. In Word and Sacrament, this same Jesus comes to us again today to touch our eyes so that we might truly see – see him for who he is and for the purpose of his coming and, like the man, invite us to respond, "Lord, I believe". May we respond in that way not just in worship today but in and through our lives this coming week. May God bless us all to that end for Jesus' sake. Amen.