
Sunday of the Man Born Blind – 2020

Acts 16:16-34 & John 9:1-38

When someone comes to you with a problem, how do you respond to such a person in great need? One way is to discover the cause of the problem. When your friend says, "I cannot see." Next, you try to determine what caused the problem. Perhaps it is cataracts. Your final response is learning how to solve the problem. All these responses are excellent, but only the last one matters if you are the person who cannot see.

In our Gospel reading this morning, the blind man did not worry about Jesus' moral qualities. He did not ask whether Jesus' methods were orthodox. The only thing that mattered to him was that Jesus restored his sight. Lending a helping hand is all that matters when people are in dire need. (John 9:141)

The blind man whom Jesus met was blind from birth. He had no idea how beautifully God created nature. He could only distinguish his family and friends by recognizing their voices. This lack of vision must have been problematic, especially back then. That society had no schools for the blind back then. The thought of training dogs as guides never occurred until much later. The Braille system that enables the blind to read and write would not be invented until many centuries later as well. Today, many of those who cannot see still manage to live productive lives. In the ancient world, it was much different. Blind people were considered helpless. People either pitied or scorned them.

The immediate response by the disciples was to assign blame. So, they asked Jesus, "What caused this man to be born blind? Was it his sin or the sin of his parents?" The question was ludicrous. How could this man's sin have caused his blindness? He had always been blind. A person cannot sin before being born! So, the Lord answered saying, "This was for the glory of God."

Yet, we have not entirely outgrown the disciples' tendency to look for blame. Faced with a difficult problem or a human need, many are still inclined to fix the fault. The reason is apparent. If we can figure out how people are responsible for their misfortunes, we need not worry about it. We can wash our hands of it and say, "He brought it on himself."

Jesus gave an appropriate response by doing what He can. His primary concern was solving the problem, not laying blame for it. When someone is hurting, what does it matter why it happened? Jesus never gave a thought to the Sabbath and its observance. What difference did the

specifics of Sabbath observance make in the face of human suffering? He said to his disciples: "We must work the works of the one who sent me while it is day; night comes when no one can work." To Jesus, the holiest or religious thing a person could do was help someone in need. After this brief remark, he opened the eyes of the man born blind.

When the Pharisees ask Jesus, "Are you saying we are blind?" Jesus is not very compassionate in His response when he replies, "If you were blind, then you would have no sin, but because you see, then you have no excuse." In other words, if you were blind, you could claim ignorance and innocence, but you see what you are doing to harm others with your rules, so, therefore, you are guilty. Those who judge will be judged. Jesus says, "For judgement, I have come into this world, that those who do not see will see – those born blind will see – and those who see – those who bind others with the law – will be blind.

In his book, "*An Anthropologist on Mars*", neurologist Oliver Sacks tells about Virgil, a man who had been blind from early childhood. When he was 50, Virgil underwent surgery and received the given gift of sight. But as he and Dr. Sacks discovered, having the physical capacity for sight differs from seeing.

None of us can do what Jesus did or even come close. But we can do something. We all have opportunities every day to help someone. So, why do we fail to take advantage of them? It is because personal concerns fill our minds. But we can teach ourselves a different way of thinking. We can train our eyes to look for opportunities to help, even small ones. Helping others in whatever we can, is more realistic. We cannot open blind eyes, but we can open our eyes to people with problems. By doing whatever we can to help them, is the appropriate human response. There are over 350,000 front-line workers in the battle against COVID-19, who are responding during this pandemic. Not only are their eyes open, thankfully, they can also see.

O God, we are grateful for people meeting human needs. These helpers are doing their part to make this a better world for all of God's children. May the rest of us join in and enlarge their number.

Amen!