



GOSPEL GOSSIP

Christ heals a blind man

St John 9. 1-41

Sunday 15 March

This is the gospel reading set for the 4th Sunday in Lent, but most churches will be using the readings for Mothering Sunday. However, there is still a Lenten theme even to the alternative readings, but to remain true to the sequence in the cycle of readings, the gospel we reflect on here is that of the healing of the blind man. It is in two parts: first the actual healing of the blind man and then the Pharisees' reaction to it.

It is a strange irony that as the coronavirus infection rates grow, that the means by which Jesus effects a cure is even more seemingly distasteful than at other times. He spits, makes a muddy paste and smears it on the blind man's eyes. Jesus has dismissed the popular belief that the man's blindness was the result of sin, and before him sees a human being, outcast and ignored by most of society, at best an object of pity or charity, and at worst seen as an inconvenience who shouldn't be seen hanging around begging. Jesus heals him and sends him off to wash his face in a holy pool.

- Do you ascribe others' illness to sin, or as is said today, 'lifestyle choice'?
- Do you see the person or the illness?
- Would you be prepared to undergo something 'degrading' in order to be well?
- How much does pride affect treatment?
- Would you need to change as a result of sickness or a cure?

The Pharisees were more concerned about preserving their own self-considered role as guardians of the Jewish traditions rather than preaching the faith. For them faith was summarised in the Law, and by its rigid observance, faith was confirmed. Perhaps it's the other way around – that faith leads to the keeping of the Law? The Pharisees were dead set against Jesus – literally. They resented the fact that people were drawn to him and followed him, and that their control was weakening. They kept an eye on him – they weren't in any way ignorant of him or his teaching.

Their questions were not 'open' ones; they had the specific purpose of getting Jesus to make an unwise statement or perform an injudicious action (all in their eyes) so they could discredit them. They suggested that the blind man wasn't actually blind. They threatened expulsion from the synagogue to those who became followers of Jesus. However, they could not stop people's belief in Jesus. Jesus always countered their accusations with a question or statement that they couldn't refute.

- Do you try to 'explain away' Jesus' teaching and miracles?
- Are you more drawn to discrediting arguments rather than those to Jesus' credit?
- Have you made excuses not to believe in Jesus?
- IS it possible that you encounter Jesus without knowing – how?
- Would you be prepared to speak up for Jesus?

In a way, it's unfortunate that we tend to major on the Mothering Sunday gospel readings, even if the Church does keep a Lenten 'feel', as this means that we can lose the progression of the gospels towards the Passion of Christ, and not understand as fully the hatred he encountered from those whom he came to save. This passage, a long one, does help us to appreciate more fully not only the prevailing opinion against Jesus, but also how can also view Jesus subjectively rather than objectively.