

4th Sunday of Lent “The Man Born Blind”
Bishop Frank Schuster

Some of you remember Bishop George Thomas when he was an auxiliary bishop for the Archdiocese of Seattle. He is now bishop of Las Vegas. When he was assigned there, I thought to myself, “Well, that’s a gamble”. Just kidding, Bishop Thomas was a sure bet. The people there won the jackpot, so to speak. However, when Bishop Thomas was here in Seattle, he shared a story during a homily for Confirmation. He said it was a true story, about a blind mother who had a son. This son of hers was always good about leading his blind mother around, helping her to get into and out of the passenger side of vehicles, helping her to shop. Whenever this son of hers left home for school, or to play with friends, his mother would always receive a hug. She would always remind him to be careful and to be safe out there. One day, after breakfast, the son picked up his book bag and headed for the door. Again, the mother said, “be safe son, be careful.” The son walked back to his mother and kissed her on the cheek and said, “Don’t worry mom, I will always be your eyes for you”. The son left for school, and as he darted across a busy intersection, a car accidentally ran into this boy, killing him instantly.

This was a terrible tragedy and a horrific accident that robbed this child of his life and robbed his mother of her son. But something remarkable happened. It turned out that the doctors were able to transplant the boy’s retinas to his mother’s eyes thereby restoring her sight. The last words of the son to his mother were prophetic; “I will always be your eyes for you mom.” In the profound sorrow of the terrible loss of her son, these last words to her gave her comfort. And she had the gift of living the rest of her days seeing the world through her son’s eyes.

My friends, why do bad things happen to good people? “Why indeed?” was the question on the minds of the disciples at the beginning of the Gospel. Noticed how the Gospel story begins! The disciples ask Jesus, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Now notice how sinners operate! Instead of having compassion on the man born blind, they want to assign blame so that they can have the comfort of believing they can avoid this infirmity.

Jesus does not offer them this comfort, “Neither he nor his parents sinned; it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him.” The disciples begin the story blind. Jesus is asking them to see God’s glory and love shine through infirmity. People with a physical disability ought to be treated with the same love and respect as anyone else. Jesus makes that very clear when he restores sight to the man born blind.

Indeed, after Jesus gives sight to the man born blind, we see that Jesus’ gift of sight isn’t limited to the man’s eyes. The man also gains spiritual sight that grows as the story progresses. He begins by referring to his healer as “the man called Jesus”. His spiritual sight progresses when he refers to Jesus as “a prophet”. At the end of the story, his spiritual sight becomes crystal clear when he confesses Jesus to be “Lord”, a title reserved only for the Deity.

Meanwhile, as the man born blind grows in spiritual sight, notice how the religious leaders in the story become progressively spiritually blind. They do not take the man for his word, they bring in the man's parents for questioning, and they can't get past their bias that Jesus is, in their eyes, a sinner.

The drama heats up as our hero's spiritual sight becomes restored to the point where he becomes an evangelist. Just like the woman at the well last week, the story begins with this man alone and in isolation. After an encounter with the Lord, the man becomes an evangelist.

The religious leaders, refusing to see the amazing grace at work in this man's life, shut their eyes to the miracle that has taken place, denounced the man as a sinner, and threw him out of the synagogue. By the end of the story, an ironic reversal of fortune has taken place. The blind man sees and those who claim to see are actually spiritually blind.

My friends, who are we in the story? Who are we in the story? I would like to suggest that we are all, every one of us, the man born blind. The sight that is given to us at birth isn't sufficient for seeing God. We need a different sight for that, the sight that comes from faith. Now, all of us have received a special gift of spiritual sight in baptism. Just as Jesus sent the man born blind to the waters of Siloam, we were sent to the waters of baptism. We are all now challenged to see the world differently because of that amazing grace. Indeed, like in the story I shared at the beginning, just as the son promised his mother that he would always be her eyes, similarly in a way, on the night before Jesus died for us, Jesus promised us that he would always be our eyes, if we become one with him in the Eucharist. And what would happen if we saw the world around us with Jesus' eyes?

What would happen if we saw the world around us with Jesus' eyes?

Would we look at our family members differently if we saw them with Jesus' eyes? Think about it!

Would we look at our co-workers differently if we saw them with Jesus' eyes?

Would we look at the unborn, struggling families, people who live on the periphery, people with infirmity, people experiencing homelessness differently, if we saw them with Jesus' eyes?

Look! Would we see world events and our politics differently if we saw these things through Jesus' eyes? My friends, would you look at the person in the mirror differently if you saw yourself with Jesus' eyes? Can you look in the mirror with the same love and kindness Jesus has for you? Can you accept the invitation to see yourself with a different sight like what an unnamed man saw in the waters of Siloam? "Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me, I once was lost but now I'm found, I was blind, but now I see."