

Homily:

Like many things in St. John's Gospel, the washing that takes place in this morning's New Testament lesson is highly symbolic. The man who is cured represents all of us in our natural state – unable to see the truth, unable to perceive many things about the world we live in, unable even to perceive many things about ourselves that is until Jesus opens our eyes.

We are creatures of dust, as we learn from Genesis, and Jesus begins to cure this man by imposing on him the symbol of his created nature, just as every priest does on Ash Wednesday. Jesus takes the dust of the earth, holds it together with his own spittle, places it over the man's flawed eyes, and tells him to go and wash it off.

This is an example of baptismal imagery. We pray in the baptismal rite that the child or adult may be given what he does not have in the natural state into which he is born. The man washes off his old nature as symbolized by the mud and emerges from the water complete and whole. He is able to see. He has a new life.

But although he has been given a new life, he still has to grow into that new life. When asked what he believes about Jesus the man said, "He is a prophet." It was not until later that he fully recognized the divinity of Jesus and worshiped him.

Nevertheless, the man became an evangelist, as all baptized people should become. When I say that word, evangelist, you may think of someone on television waving an open bible such as Joel Osteen or some other late night preacher but that's not what I mean by an evangelist. I don't even mean someone preaching on a street corner or knocking on doors to ask people if they are saved. What the word "evangelist" really means in its classical sense is someone who announces good news. In this case the good news was that the man had been healed and made whole by Jesus.

All of us can be evangelists in that sense, and this is something we should all strive to be. All you have to do is testify to your own experience. Often the opportunity to do that emerges when someone asks you why you do things so many people do not do – simple things like why you attend church every week even though our lives are hectic, or why you say grace before a meal, even in restaurants. Maybe it is why you read scripture or say Morning Prayer. How we live our life, our choices and what we put our focus on, makes a difference to our friends, coworkers and even strangers who are watching.

The man in the story paid a price for his testimony, and sometimes you may experience a negative reaction as well. At the time this gospel was written, the leaders of the Jewish religion had agreed among themselves that anyone who confessed Jesus as a prophet, much less as the Messiah, would be expelled from the synagogues and treated as an outcast.

That is why the man's parents were so careful about their testimony. They were willing to confirm that the man who had been healed was their son, and that he had indeed been blind from birth.

Beyond that they were unwilling to say anything. "He is of age," they said, "ask him what happened."

In our society today, you are likewise in danger of becoming an outcast if you dare to testify in public about your faith in Jesus. People may shun or mock you. In our current cancel culture people might question your intelligence or integrity because you believe and have faith. You have to ask yourself, Is that a price you are willing to pay?

The elite scholars in the story had no respect either for Jesus or for his witness. They assumed that since Jesus, who was not one of them, could not have done what the man said he did. When the man defended his position, they replied "Thou was altogether born in sin, and would you teach us?" The elite in society often say pretty much the same thing to those of us whom they consider to be ignorant and gullible.

Despite this pressure, the man stuck to his story. He could not deny his own experience, and he would not let others deny it either. So, he was in fact ejected from the synagogue and consigned to the margins of society.

But then a wonderful thing happened. Jesus himself sought him out and came to him and strengthened his faith. This is something Jesus does quite frequently. He does not leave His witnesses hanging out alone and unsupported. He will not leave you that way either when you give your testimony.

“Do you believe in the Son of Man?” asked Jesus.

“Who is he?” asked the man. “I am,” replied Jesus.

In that little exchange, Jesus not only gave the man new insight, but He also claimed to be the only one who had a right to judge the man. He assured him that it really didn't matter what the elite might say or what anybody might think. The only opinion that mattered was the judgment of The Son of Man.

The Son of Man is a figure in the book of Daniel who comes in the clouds of heaven, as Jesus did in his ascension. He stands before the throne of The Ancient of Days and is given the authority to judge the nations of the world.

When we say in the Nicene creed that Jesus shall come again in glory to judge both the quick and the dead, this is what we are saying.

He is the One who sits upon the throne of glory in the famous 25th chapter of St. Matthew's gospel. In this He passes judgement on the world, dividing the sheep from the goats, admitting the sheep to His Kingdom and casting the goats into the everlasting fire.

To further clarify, lets read a little farther than we heard today. One verse beyond where the New Testament reading stopped.

“And Jesus said, ‘For judgment I am come into the world, that they which see not might see, and that they which see might be made blind.’”

Someone once told me that what other people think of you is none of your business. In my 50 plus years on this planet, I have found this to be often very true. It doesn't really matter what other people think about you. What matters is what God thinks of you. He alone has the authority to admit you to His eternal presence or to send you off by yourself where you really are an outcast.

Jesus himself says, “Fear not them that kill the body but are not able to kill the soul, but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

The psalmist states in Psalm 56 “In God have I put my trust. I will not fear what flesh can do unto me.”

And again, in Psalm 118 “The Lord is on my side. I will not fear what man can do to me.”

St. Paul says to his critics in the Corinthian church, “It is a small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human tribunal. I do not even judge myself.... It is the Lord who judges me.”

The man in the story was willing to be banished from the synagogue for his witness to the power of Christ. The whole Christian community, to whom the Fourth Gospel was directed, was likewise banished and persecuted by the religious elite. The Apostles and many others were executed for their testimony before the political rulers of the day. But Christ sustained every one of them and endowed them with His own glory. So shall He do with all of you who have the courage to testify boldly to what Jesus has meant in your life.

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