

# What We Can Learn from the Healing of the Man Born Blind

MARCH 6, 2016 BY DEACON MICHAEL BICKERSTAFF INTO THE DEEP,  
SUNDAY SCRIPTURE REFLECTIONS



**“JESUS OPENS THE EYES OF THE MAN BORN BLIND” (DETAIL)  
BY DUCCIO**

In St. John’s Gospel, there is the account of the healing of the man born blind (John 9:1-41). It is the sixth of the seven signs recounted by St. John that announce the fulfillment of the Old Covenant in the New Covenant and the passing away of the old rites, replaced by the grace and sacraments of Jesus Christ. It is also the passages associated with the second of the Scrutinies undergone by the elect (those to be baptized at the Easter Vigil Mass) in the process of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. You may have heard it this past Sunday if the Scrutiny was celebrated during the Mass you attended. The three passages are:

- First Scrutiny (on the Third Sunday of Lent) — I Am the Living Water: Jesus and the Samaritan Woman at the Well; John 4:5-42

- Second Scrutiny (on the Fourth Sunday of Lent) — I Am the Light of the World: Jesus Heals the Man Born Blind; John 9:1-41
- Third Scrutiny (on the Fifth Sunday of Lent) — I Am the Resurrection and the Life: Jesus Raises Lazarus from the Dead; John 11:1-45

The Church teaches that “the scrutinies are meant to uncover, then heal all that is weak, defective, or sinful in the hearts of the elect; to bring out, then strengthen all that is upright, strong, and good.” While the Scrutinies are for the elect, these passages from the Gospel are also helpful for all Christians as we seek to deepen our relationship with the Lord.

Let’s take a look at the lesson of the Man Born Blind used for the second scrutiny.

### **Jesus Christ—The Light of the World**

In the very opening of his Gospel, St. John announces in the prologue that a light has come into a world shrouded in darkness:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. A man named John was sent from God. He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came to be through him, but the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him. But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name, who were born not by natural generation nor by human choice nor by a man’s decision but of God. And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth.”

This is the proclamation of the coming of the Messiah whose announcement by the Archangel Gabriel to Mary we celebrate on the Solemnity of the Annunciation. St. John develops the theme of Light and Darkness in chapters 9 and 10 of his Gospel.

Jesus tells us in John 9:5 that he is the Light of the World. What does the Church teach us about this passage.

### **Spiritual Blindness**

A literal reading of this event tells us that a man who was physically blind from birth was healed by Jesus on the Sabbath. The authorities focus on the fact that Jesus performed this healing on the Sabbath and accuse Him of not “keeping the Sabbath”—therefore accusing Him of sin and asserting that He cannot be sent from God. In their misunderstanding of the law and in their pride that made them fearful of losing their influence over the people, they remained closed to the work and presence of God in their midst. In this way, they too were blind—spiritually blind.

But if we read carefully, we will see that it was not only the authorities who were blinded by pride and ignorance. Others were blind as a result of their own circumstances and beliefs, even good people such as the apostles. This should serve as a warning to us today to be on guard against pride, ignorance and sin in our own lives and to be prepared, by the grace of God, to recognize it, root it out and leave it behind. We can see at least four groups of people who are blind, in some fashion, in this story:

- The apostles
- The Man Born
- The Parents of the Man Born Blind
- The Pharisees

### **1. The Apostles**

As the recounting of the event begins, we read that the disciples asked Jesus, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Although the Apostles had been with Jesus for an extended time, they clung to the common belief of the day that some particular personal sin was the cause of this man’s physical blindness. Some Jews would have thought that the man was guilty of some personal sin committed before birth, while others might have believed his blindness was due to the personal sin of his parents or other ancestors. The question raised by the apostles suggests they believed the same or possibly that the blindness was in anticipation of some sin of the man committed after he was born. Jesus does not answer their question in general, but does answer in regards to this particular man, “Neither he nor his parents sinned; it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him.”

While it is true that death and suffering in the world are the result of sin, both Original and personal, we must remember that even the righteous suffer. This is clearly taught in the Old Testament story of Job.

### **2. The Man Born Blind**

Here was a man born blind for the glory of God. That his physical suffering prepared him to be open to receive the Light of Christ is apparent. We will see his stages of conversion in just a moment and see how his response can guide each of us in our day.

### **3. The Parents**

At first, the authorities doubted that the man was actually blind prior to his “healing.” So they called in the man’s parents to receive their testimony. His parents were afraid of being expelled from the temple, so in their fear would only attest to his blindness from birth; they would not acknowledge his healing as God’s work, but instead told the authorities to ask their son themselves.

#### **4. The Pharisees**

As said above, these men were puffed up in pride and were also afraid of losing their position and influence, so they refused to see the obvious—as such, they were the truly blind.

#### **What We Can Learn**

The true light has come into the world and He is Jesus. We receive this light that enlightens mankind when we are baptized. At baptism, we promise to live in the light and give testimony to Him.

But, we must not be prideful in this fact; we must honor and be faithful to our baptismal promises. Nor must we be afraid of doing so.

It is at our baptism (and even prior) that our conversion began. If we were baptized as infants, there came a time when we had acquired the use of reason when we needed to take on personally this act of conversion and surrender to the Lord. But as we should know, just as there are stages of conversion leading to that acceptance of Christ, the conversion continues until the time of our death.

There will be times when we want to cling to the ways of the world and the pressure of our peers. We will be tempted in pride to assert that we know better than God and to do it “our way.” There will be times when we are afraid—afraid of losing acclaim, acceptance, wealth, prestige, and even what we mistake for love—and we will be tempted to reject the Light of the World. The message of the world is loud and persistent, and if we let it, the message can be persuasive. We will be tempted to deny the obvious—the one thing we do know with certainty—and to accept the lies of the evil one. Let’s look at the example of the man born blind for guidance.

As the man born blind was cured of his physical blindness, he also underwent a healing of his spiritual blindness. We can see this in how he progressively refers to Jesus, first as “the man called Jesus” in verse 11, then “he is a prophet” in verse 17, then as “from God” in verse 33 and finally when he said, “I do believe, Lord” and worshiped Christ in verse 38.

Because this man was open to the truth, the darkness gave way to the Light and his spiritual blindness was healed also. Throughout our own days, we too are called to this ever deepening relationship with the Lord, even beyond the point of calling Him Lord and worshiping Him. This conversion must continue to deepen so that our communion with Him will deepen and we will attain our supernatural end.

The irony of the confrontation between the man and the Pharisees is shared by us in our daily confrontation with the world and our own temptations.

This man who was supposedly an inferior of the Pharisees was the more enlightened of the two. And we Christians who are not of the world, but are nonetheless in the world, are to be the more enlightened of the two also.

The Pharisees absurdly demanded that this man deny the one thing of which he was certain—that he had been born blind that that the Lord had restored to him his sight; they demanded that he accept their spiritual blindness as truth and embrace darkness as light. We can look to our own encounters with the world and see the times when we are asked to deny the one thing that we know with certainty—the love and grace of Christ our Savior—and instead we are asked to embrace the sin that this world demands that we mistakenly see as enlightenment. Absurd! Really! Could anything be more absurd than to give up eternal happiness and blessedness for a destructive pleasure and a lie?

May we ever cling to the Light that banishes the darkness which is all around us. When the world, in its own language, twists the meaning of the words of the man whose sight was restored and asks us, “Do you want to become his disciple, too?” ... let us shout, unafraid and in loving faithfulness, “We do and we are!”