

Today's Gospel reading is a long and somewhat complex story, and yet it is rich with symbolism and meaning. Rather than simply recounting the details of a miracle, St. John gives us a story designed to draw us in, to help us understand how Jesus enters into our lives, offering healing and peace.

Let's take a closer look at this story and explore how it relates to God's love for you and for me.

An important detail is the fact that the blind person in this story never asked to be healed. Nearly every other healing from Jesus recounted in our scriptures was in response to a plea that was either made by the person in need or by a loved one. But in this story, we find a blind person who was simply sitting near the gate of the Temple, quietly seeking alms. This person hadn't even heard about Jesus before they encountered one another.

It was Jesus who took the initiative. This blind person symbolizes you and me – our blindness, the stumbling blocks we face in life, and our need for healing. In our creation, it was God who chose us and called us each by name. And today, it is God who sees into our hearts, who offers healing and love, even when we don't recognize the need.

In our Gospel reading, Jesus used his saliva to make a paste with the dirt from the earth. In so doing, Jesus connected our faith journey with the creation story; God created humanity from the clay of the earth. Jesus applied the clay mixed with his own saliva to this person's eyes so that he could be reborn, recreated, in God's love. Then, Jesus sends this person to go and to wash in the pool of Siloam where he gains sight.

In our lives, Jesus offers new life through baptism. It is in our Baptism where we were reborn, where we put on the clothes of Christ and were anointed priest, prophet and King. Like the person born blind, our faith grows with experience and hard work. The initial tepid answer that "someone named Jesus healed him" grew to a bold proclamation of "I do believe, Lord."

All of us have a story. We've all done things for which we are not proud. But as we journey with Christ we are invited to let go of shame and open ourselves to the Light.

God has given us the Church to help guide us on our journey. While the institutional church and church leaders are not without fault, God works with and through human imperfections. Like the Pharisees, over the years the institutional church has made some pretty serious mistakes, hurting people and leading them away from their faith. But the Church has also done amazing things and has led people closer to God. This is God's house and though imperfect, all are welcome to join together at the table of the Lord. Since this is God's house, it is also your house, your Church, and together we form the Body of Christ here on earth.

God also gives us the sacraments of the Church to help us live in the Light. In addition to Baptism, the other sacraments also help us move to a closer relationship with our loving God.

- The Eucharist nourishes our soul and gives us strength to continue our journey. It lets us feast at the Table of the Lord, receiving the living God in a real and tangible way.
- Reconciliation or confession is a way to bring healing into our lives, to break the chains that sin holds by letting go of secrets and admitting our misdeeds and asking for God's mercy and forgiveness. Confession is a powerful experience of love and forgiveness that has unfortunately fallen out of favor with many today.
- Confirmation is an adult proclamation of our beliefs, an opportunity to be sealed with the Holy Spirit.
- Marriage is a way to form our relationship with another person in God's love and grace; to demonstrate and experience fidelity, living not as one, but as a union.
- Anointing of the Sick is a reminder of God's healing love and mercy in our time of need.

- And Ordination is an opportunity to serve God as a minister in the Church with the task of leading others to a closer union with God.

Embracing the cross is part of our faith journey. God did not promise us easy lives without pain and sacrifice, but in the same token, God does not punish us with adversity. The challenges we face are an opportunity for us to renew our faith and respond to adversity with faith and dignity. In today's Gospel passage, we are challenged to be the Light of Christ in the world and that involves speaking out against injustice, to bring healing and forgiveness to those around us. Living in the Light of Christ will sometimes lead us into conflict with the world around us, but God will give us the courage and grace to endure, to speak the truth with bold confidence, when we embrace life with the Light of the World.

My friends, our relationship with Jesus is a process that involves struggles, of falling and getting back up. Our journey involves beginnings and endings, happiness and pain. As many times as we fall, we have the opportunity to get back up and begin again walking in the Light of Christ. The sacraments, attending mass, spending time in prayer are not just pious expressions of faith but they are real ways to nourish and strengthen us for the challenges we continue to face.

As we continue our Lenten Journey, I encourage you to think about today's Gospel reading throughout the week. Reread it, pray about it, reflect on how God is calling you to journey toward the cross and resurrection.