

4th Sunday of Lent, 2017 A cycle

(Place a block of clay on a pedestal.) Before us is a block of clay. Any sculptor worth their salt would have has vision of what it can become. One artist may see something very different coming out of the clay than another.

I raise the topic of clay because it is mentioned in our gospel reading today.

- Jesus meets the blind man: he wants to help him see.**
 - He takes spit and mixes it with mud to make a clay,**
 - smears it on the man's eyes.**
 - He tells the man to go the Pool of Siloam, wash and he will be able to see. (Slight pause).....**
 - The man has been blind from birth**
 - Jesus, the divine sculptor, is creating this man anew.**
 - He is giving him sight!**

- **This is not the first time God had used clay to create life.**
 - **Remember in the 2nd chapter of the Book of Genesis how God took the clay of the earth and fashioned it into a human form.**
 - **Then he *breathed* life into the clay and it became a human being.**
 - **Now Jesus is breathing life into this blind man and he is becoming alive with the Spirit of God.**

In today's Gospel John gives three different reactions to the cure of the blind man:

- **First, there are the Pharisees. They do not see the Spirit at work. The Pharisees know that Jewish religious Law forbids people to be work with clay on the Sabbath, and with good reason. For when the Israelites were slaves in Egypt, they had to make bricks out of clay and straw for their masters. It is in obedience to the God who gave them freedom from slavery that they keep the law and do not work on the Sabbath. They cannot see the action of God in the curing of the man born blind. They themselves are blind to God's spirit alive in Jesus.**

- **Second, we have the reaction of the blind man's parents who SEE what is happening ... their son who was blind from birth can now see... but they are afraid to witness to the fact that it was Jesus who freed him from blindness.**
- **Third, there is the man born blind who is on a journey to faith. Just like this block of clay can be slowly transformed into something beautiful, so also does the Divine Sculptor slowly carve away the excess in the blind man's life so that he can see clearly. Much like in sculpting something, it takes time for him to see what God is creating in him.**

Notice in the story how it takes many stages of growth for the blind man to come to faith in Jesus.

- **First, when the blind man is asked who gave him sight, he simply responds "It was that man they call Jesus".**
- **Later, when pushed further he declares, "He is a prophet"**
- **Finally when Jesus fully reveals himself to him as the savior, the blind man says, "I do believe."**

- Surely the gospel writer is placing the blind man as an example for us as we ourselves grow in belief. Much like a statue emerges out of a block of clay, so does it become clear to the blind man that Jesus is the Messiah.
 - But there is a cost for believing, professing the truth;
 - The man born blind needs to face the disagreeing with authorities;
 - He is thrown out of the temple,
 - He becomes a disciple of Jesus

(PAUSE)

- As you listen to the Gospel story, where do you find yourself?
 - Are you the blind man who cannot clearly see but are open to let Jesus mold you so that you can see clearly?
 - Or are you one of the Pharisees: stuck in an old and limited view of our faith and not open to growth. Let me give you an example of how we can be stuck in our faith growth like the Pharisees.

- **Many of us have grown up in an experience of the church where we let the Father and the Sisters do the instruction. Maybe we thought the faith growth of our children would happen simply by sending them to a Catholic School. Maybe we don't take seriously our family's attendance at Generations of Faith sessions; or being part of a Emmaus faith sharing group; or getting children to faith formation experiences and sacraments and working with them at home to prepare for the sacraments; or entering into a full, active, conscious participation in the mass each Sunday; or taking the time to celebrate the mercy of God in the sacrament of reconciliation. Then we are surprised when our children...or even ourselves... lose our faith. (pause) We can be like the Pharisees refusing to let God mold us into being fully alive in the Spirit.**

- **Or maybe we are like the blind man's parents who do not want to get too involved in church because it will cost us.**
 - **We avoid a pattern of active involvement and commitment to help grow our faith community**
 - **By not participating in church committees and outreach activities in the church and in society. (pictures in the back of church)**
 - **Many of us hold back full support of the community. 100 families give $\frac{3}{4}$ of the funds to support the church; the other 650 households give $\frac{1}{4}$. We can be stuck in the old habits thinking someone from Europe or the Vatican is going to finance the work of Christ. That world is gone. We are not a missionary church. We are a church on mission.**

○ I don't know about you, but when I look at the responses of the blind man, the blind man's parents and the Pharisees, I see a bit of all three in me.

- At times I am like the Pharisees and resist God's call to see what his call is all about.
- At other times I am like the blind man's parents and see clearly the direction I should be going but am afraid to get involved and fully committed.

Then there those good moments when I am like the man born blind, open to God molding and fashioning me into something beautiful for God.

Here is the question for the week: Are you willing to encounter God no matter what are the consequences? The blind man was open, and his encounter with Christ radically changed his life.

- Lord, heal my blindness.
- Remove my fears.
- Help me to see.
- Fashion and mold me into the image of your Son.