

To really get into the readings today I would like to talk with you about purgatory!

Yes purgatory.

Have you ever tried to explain purgatory to a protestant?

Purgatory is often defined as a place of temporary hell until we are purged from our sins? The typical response of most protestants is, “ I can’t find anything about purgatory in the Bible? Well maybe it is in the Bible. Let me suggest another way to look at purgatory by reflecting on the man born blind in today’s gospel who is seeing for the first time (Rolheiser)

Let me define Purgatory this way: Purgatory is seeing God in our incompleteness, seeing God when we are not ready to look at him face to face.

Now I always thought that the man in today’s gospel who was cured from his blindness would be happy and rejoicing. But those who work with people blind from birth who have actually regained their sight say that is not the way it happens.

Here is how JZ Young, an authority on brain function, describes what actually happens:

The patient on opening his eyes gets little or no enjoyment; indeed, he finds the experience painful. He reports only a spinning mass of light and colors. He proves to be quite unable to pick up objects by sight, to recognize what they are, or to name them. He has no conception of space with objects in it, although he knows all about objects and their names by touch. 'Of course,' you will say, 'he must take a little time to learn to recognize them by sight.' Not a little time, but a very long time, in fact, years. His brain has not been trained in the rules of seeing. We are not conscious that there are any such rules; we think we see, as we say naturally. But we have in fact learned a whole set of rules during childhood." (See: Emilie Griffin, [\*Souls in Full Sail\*](#), p. 143-144)

And so the man born blind slowly and with great effort learns how to see. But it is not just physical seeing which will take time. In our Gospel story it takes time for the blind man to "SEE" who Jesus is.

The first time he is questioned about who cured him, he answers "The man named Jesus took mud, rubbed it on my eyes, told me to go and wash in the pool of Siloam, and now I can see.

Later on he says in answer to the Pharisees' questioning, that Jesus is a prophet.

And finally when questioned by Jesus he says, "I do believe Lord". I see clearly who you are.

Through some challenging questioning by the Pharisees and Jesus, he gradually comes to see who Jesus is.

Only light casts out blindness. Only love casts out sin. As he continues to encounter Jesus, he sees more clearly.

**PAUSE**

In our first reading today we also hear about blindness. The prophet Samuel comes to Bethlehem to choose a new king for Israel from the family of Jesse. Jesse naturally offers him his eldest son. Samuel rejects Jesse's oldest son and all of his sons except the last son out in the fields as Samuel says "Not as people see does God see, because people see the appearance but the Lord looks into the heart. We too can be blind like Jesse.

"So often we look at poor people and see nothing other than rundown houses and littered streets.

We look at the homeless and see nothing other than dirty faces and ragged clothes.

**We look at people who are different from us and we see nothing other than the color of their skin or the way they manipulate their bodily limbs.” Gerald Daring**

**We look at our children or we look at our parents and do not recognize the KING DAVID in our midst.**

**PAUSE**

**Why are the Pharisees in today’s gospel story so against Jesus healing the blind man on the Sabbath? Because they will lose their power and their wealth and control if Jesus actually has divine power. He will take over. They blind themselves to the truth before their very eyes.**

**Isn’t that a big part of the problem with the child abuse question and its cover up in the Church today... the fear of the loss of power and wealth and status. Yet we too often fail to see the truth and are willing to witness to the power of the Lord working in us.**

**We thank God that there are people who have gained their sight and witness to the truth in our midst. I was surprised to find an Example of the witness of the blind man in our midst in the sport section of the Detroit Free Press last week. It was about Cassius Winston, point guard for Michigan State Spartans: (Tell about their run for the national championship and what their head coach said about him.**

He sees things differently; how we relate to people; example: lunch with a professional basketball player who is married and has a child and with a goofball freshman. The gift separates the good from the great leaders. This is so different from Pharisees who are blind to God's unending love for all people. The team acts that way at meals: Sit with different players, upper and lower classmen and different races and with coaches. It got me thinking about our coffee and donuts in the Rainbow Room. How often do we reach out and talk with someone outside our group? How about in our schools, and at workplaces, in our neighborhood, or even in our homes?

The man born blind was moving  
from blindness to light,  
from hell to heaven,  
from the absence of God to seeing God face to face.

This Lent we are on a sacred journey. May we encounter the Lord and be changed.