

A few weeks ago as I was waiting at Mary Greeley Hospital for my car to be delivered by the valet parking staff, a woman entered the lobby and said, “I’m blind. Can someone help me?”

In today’s gospel story Jesus heals a man born blind. How many years he has lived in darkness we are not told. Jesus simply and powerfully, sees his plight and responds to it. At the same time, like his encounter with the woman at the well last Sunday, Jesus uses the occasion to reveal himself and his mission: “While I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (Jn.9:5).

The effect of Jesus’ word and action is immediate—physical sight is restored to the formerly blind man. At the same time he has received a greater gift of sight-- the grace divine insight into the person and mission of Jesus. To Jesus’ question, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” the formerly blind man responds, “Who is he sir so that I may believe in him?” to which Jesus answers, “You have seen him and the one speaking to you is he.” This is enough to evoke from the formerly blind man a simple and profound profession of faith, “I do believe, Lord” as he drops to his knees in worship of Jesus (Jn. 9:35-38). Earlier in the story the formerly blind man had already exhibited the physical and spiritual effects of his healing as he boldly witnessed his faith in Jesus before the Pharisees and other Jewish religious authorities. The blind man, like the Samaritan woman last week, is a symbol for the life of discipleship—a seeker for truth who encounters, or more precisely, is encountered by Jesus, who through this encounter and faith in the Word of God spoken to him is transformed, and who then in turn becomes an apostle, of Jesus and the Kingdom of God. Once again in his encounter with the blind man, like last weekend’s meeting with the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus does not focus on whatever may have been the man’s past or present moral state (sin). He sees a wounded child of God upon whom he lavishes the fullness of grace—no questions asked.

Jesus' disciples initially, and the Pharisees and other Jewish religious authorities right to the end of the story, on the other hand see this encounter very differently. For them it is a question about sin on the part of the man or his parents since at the time physical disease and disability were thought to be divine retribution for public or private sin either by an individual, or if a child, by the parents (a view not entirely absent even from some Christians still today). Even more, the Pharisees and the Jewish religious authorities also see Jesus as a sinner since in curing the blind man on the Sabbath he broke the religious law of Sabbath observance. Their supposed goodness and moral righteousness, has blinded them to Jesus. Like Samuel as he sets out to anoint God's chosen king from among Jesse's sons and sees first Eliab the oldest and strongest, as surely being God's "chosen" and finds it hard to believe that David, the smallest and youngest could possibly be God's chosen one, the Jewish religious leaders do not take kindly to either the person and message of a carpenter's son from the backwater and religiously suspect town of Nazareth in Galilee, much less to being schooled by a former blind beggar (if he even was blind to begin with as he claims). Yet, once the choice of David was revealed by God Samuel readily put his faith in the message he had heard and anointed David as king. The Pharisees and religious authorities instead remain closed, blind to God's anointed Son Jesus. They refuse to change or be changed.

This weekend we celebrate the second rite of scrutiny with our elect preparing for the Easter sacraments of baptism, confirmation and Holy Eucharist. Also this weekend we will gather for the first of two communal celebrations of the Sacrament of Penance. Both the rite of scrutiny and our celebration of the Sacrament of Penance are times for us to encounter and be encountered by Jesus. Like the man in the gospel or the woman who came into the lobby at Mary Greeley Hospital we acknowledge our blindness and pray, "Help me." And help us Jesus will. Just as in the gospel the issue for Jesus is not our sins or how long it has been since our last confession. The issue is this moment and Jesus' freely offered gifts of forgiveness and salvation. He wants us to see.