

LENT 4 A

"I washed myself and I see"

(John 9:1-41)

Arriving midway in Lent, one questions oneself about his practices and desires for conversion. The good observances since the beginning of Lent may have already been forgotten, or 'rearranged' to suit one's practical realities and deep convictions. Nevertheless, fasting, prayer and almsgiving are sure way-markers on our journey to Easter and immovable guideposts towards the fullness of the Paschal Revelation.

We certainly need to return to God, to convert, to change our lives to get as close as possible to the life of Christ, to the love of the Father, and to the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Lent, the way of grace, leads us to acceptance of true light, illuminating our being with fire so that truth and love can find their way into our lives. We grow in truth and love. We flourish in truth and love. Only truth and love can bring us closer to the Trinitarian mystery and make us participate fully in it. It is therefore necessary to accept the invitation that leads to enlightenment, and thus to the fullness of Trinitarian love. The Gospel episode of the Man Born Blind shows us a good example.

1. Lent: a purification.

Chapter 9 of St. John concerns the Man Born Blind. It follows chapter 7 in which Jesus proclaims Himself the Light of the World and chapter 8 where He states: "Before Abraham was, I AM." These episodes bring about the full revelation of the Name of God incarnate in Jesus Christ, saving the sinful world from its wretchedness. They are the fulfillment of the promises of salvation and communion given through the prophets. Jesus the Messiah is the Son - fully Man and fully God - who gives divine light and, through it, eternal life. It is necessary to open oneself to His presence and accept to be loved!

"I went": on this word of Jesus and in confidence, we must move. "Go" is the watchword given to Abraham and Moses. This is the word of love that leads Elijah to Horeb. This is the word that sets the prophets on their path. This is the word of Christ! It is a word that today resonates in our hearts as invitation to an adventure, to an interior displacement, to a pilgrimage ... *to stop is to die!* To let go of the past is to start anew. Jesus invites the blind man to do his part in the miracle that will soon become a "sign", that is, a divine manifestation. If the miracle relates the materiality of things (from one state to another), the sign then speaks to us of God (from a state to a Presence). The miracle brings admiration. The sign gives faith. The whole conversation of the blind man with the gullible crowd or with the obtuse Pharisees shows this well. The blind man himself did not immediately rejoice in the miracle: he will have to 'see again' Jesus to really see!

"I washed": How do we interpret this phrase? Is it a simple healing or a gesture that only prophets have knowledge of? Or is it a symbolic action that passes from the flesh to the soul? Jesus invites external and inner purifications. The blind man washes his eyes and in the process his soul is washed too. He touches his healed eyes and his soul suddenly sees. There are many purifications require in us: many shadows to wash, many secret gardens to water with merciful grace. Appearances are deceptive but the heart is vigilant. Our life is a constant back and forth between exteriority and interiority, between body and soul, between sin and grace. Purification is the entry of grace into the recesses of our lives and the removal of blockages of our existence. It brings cleansing from sin that has taken us away from the source of life. We need purification of

thoughts that lead to dead-ends; purification of the body that needs the heavenly balm; purification of memory that closes itself in the past; even purification of our weaknesses so that they too may become paths to God...

"I saw": The final stage is a new vision, a new attitude, a 'seeing' that finally sees the essential and the present truth. How many times does the blind man repeat this formula: "I have seen," and how many times is he asked the question: "How did it happen?" The blind man focuses on the gaze of Jesus while his interlocutors look only on the how. No one understands the why or the divine sign in the action here. And isn't seeing the most important thing? Like Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52), the other blind man in the Gospels who implored Jesus: "Rabbouni, let me see!" To see what? The visible world or the invisible world? The beauty of creation or divine beauty? The colors of the world or the colors of life? Maybe both, or one leading to the other, or one directed to the other. Indeed, it is this world in the here and now, and not another imagined realm that will make us 'see' the world elsewhere! This world here leads to the world elsewhere: it is the path of the Incarnation illuminated by the Resurrection!

2. Lent: an enlightenment.

This is our Lent: a purification that gives enlightenment. Beyond the underlying humor employed by St. John, the Gospel of the Man Born Blind is a 'baptismal parable', an initiation that leads to the true light, a progression in the matters of faith, and a plunge into a mystery. The blind man is not satisfied with mere sight, he wants to see the Son of Man, and after having been filled with astonishment, he prostrates himself before Him. He recognizes the divine presence in Jesus. He worships Christ. This gesture is certainly the strongest conclusion of this story even if the evangelist highlights the dishonesty or pride of others.

See the essentials: The real blind is the one who does not want to see the obvious, the divine gestures, the signs of God's presence. God speaks through many things and in many ways. The one who closes himself in his ideas, illusions and opinions, in his sin, is blind. He who refuses to see is blind. The true blind man is not who we think. To see is to receive, it is to perceive, it is to glimpse. To see is to open the eyes of the heart, the eyes of the soul, the ways of Heaven. Beyond the tangible things, a Presence is perceived and this Presence is love and mercy.

See God: The blind man is not mistaken. He wants more than a miracle; he wants a sign and therefore that sign is given to him. He wants to see. He sees Jesus. He opens his eyes to truth, to beauty, to light. Christ is Beauty, Truth and Light. To contemplate Him is to see God; it is to enter the divine world. To worship Him is to worship the Father in the Spirit. To love Him is to commune with the Trinitarian love. To welcome Him into his being is to enter the Heart of the Trinity and remain there. "I believe Lord!"

3. Conclusion: the faith that loves.

The blind man was looking for sight, but he saw a mystery. He was looking for a miracle; he received a sign. He was looking for the prophet Jesus; he saw the Son of Man. He sought to see the world: he saw God.

The blind man wanted sight, but he received faith. He wanted to rejoice in the miracle; he understood the sign. He wanted a normal life; he found Truth. He wanted to look at the world: he saw the invisible and touched love.

Our Lent is a purification to find enlightenment. The only Light is Christ. He is the Light who comes from the Father and springs up in the grace of the Spirit. This is the Trinitarian beauty in our lives!

Today, sharing the grace of God in this episcopal consecration, we come together as Apostolic Vicariate of Northern Arabia, to express our thanksgiving for being chosen and sent to proclaim the Majesty of God and the fullness of His love in this Peninsula. Amen.

Bp Aldo Berardi, O.S.S.T.

March 19th, 2023