

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson  
**19th March 2023 - 4th Sunday of Lent (Laetare Sunday)**

Readings (Year A): 1st: 1 Samuel 16:1,6-7,10-13. 2nd: Ephesians 5:8-14. **Gospel:** John 9:1-41

In the early centuries of the church a favourite name for baptism was Illumination or Enlightenment and in early Christian art and writings the cure of the blind man was regularly used to express the light of Christ which is given in baptism.

The symbol of light is still retained in the sacrament and in the renewal of baptism around the light of the paschal candle during the Easter Vigil. In baptism the priest lights a candle from the paschal candle and gives it to the newly baptised or their parents or sponsors: *Receive the light of Christ.*

As with the woman at the well, neither she nor the blind man are named by St John. They are taken as representatives of humanity and the stages of growth in faith. The cure of the blind man is not narrated as an instantaneous cure in the fashion of most of the gospel miracles.

The actions of Jesus are deliberate, and the slow development of the story is weighted with meaning.

Jesus daubed the blind eyes with a paste made from spittle and dust of the earth. Thus recalls the story of the creation of Adam from the dust of the earth. The Latin for earth is *humus* from which comes *humilitas*, humility.

Jesus restores people to what the creator meant them to be. In baptism we are created anew on a higher level of life: we are adopted into the life of God as daughter or son.

Then the man is told to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. St John tells us Siloam means sent. The man meets Jesus, the one who is sent by God. This naturally links with the woman at the well of Samaria. The blind man received new sight at the washing.

But as the story develops, we learn how this new gift of light had to grow. Those who believe see deeper, they see reality. They see through things down to the depths. The life that is given in baptism is as yet only a tiny plant which must be given a favourable environment and the chance to grow.

John invites us to raise our thoughts to higher levels of faith in Christ. The man rises to new levels of understanding, as did the woman. From man to prophet to sir to 'Lord I believe and worship.' Worship very important: and Jesus gives his way in The Mass.

Once the man is healed, his story has only just started. The man is a model of honesty and courage. He seeks the truth. He admits openly when there is something he doesn't know. He is a model catechumen.

The man is enlightened by Jesus and comes to full faith. Once blind, he has struggled to full faith amid insults and ill treatment. His complacent opponents remain in their blindness.

Faith in Jesus allows a new vision but depends on willingness to face new truths and even abusive treatment from others. Wherever Jesus is the world grows brighter. Our faith deepens as we listen more and more to Jesus. By steeping ourselves in the gospel and the scriptures we perpetually meet Jesus and learn to follow his way and example. Worship is the ultimate act of faith.

A beautiful prayer preparing our catechumens for baptism we can make our own:

*Father of mercy, you helped the man born blind to believe in your Son and through that faith to reach the light of your kingdom. Free your chosen ones from the falsehoods that surround and blind them. Let truth be the foundation of their lives. May they live in Christ your light for ever.*