

"Blind Spot"

Homily of March 6, 2005

by Father Brian Joyce

Long Gospel / Short Sermon! But there's a lot going on here. O.K.! One moral of the story is that if you've been blind all your life and you suddenly begin to see, and to see things really well, you're not about to take a lot of lip from critics - even if they are highly placed authorities. The early Christians must have loved this story with this spunky little blind man, nifty enough to talk back to the religious leaders of his day.

This passage and particular gospel was written at least fifty years after the death of Jesus, at a time when Jewish Christians were being excommunicated. (Notice that the parents were afraid to speak up lest they be locked out of their place of worship.) Jews were being thrown out of the synagogue if they professed belief in Jesus as Messiah and Lord. That's what was going on when this story was being written down. In fact, this whole gospel fairly bristles with anti-Jewish rhetoric that would sow the seed of pogrom and ghetto, Holocaust and hate crimes for centuries to come. But the issue was not ever anti-Semitism. It was some Jewish folks slamming other Jewish folks who just could not see what they saw, that Jesus was the light of the world.

The bad guys in the story are the Pharisees who have been getting bad press ever since. They were religion experts who revered the Law of Moses and dedicated their whole lives to obeying God, whom they had all figured out! For example, they knew that God was against work on the Sabbath, any work on any Sabbath, no exceptions! Jesus comes along and says, "Please! Please!" He sees a man blind from birth (obviously, to the Pharisees, a sinner whom he shouldn't even touch). He picks up a little clay, thought to have medicinal properties in those days. He makes a little mud pie (seen by the Pharisees as forbidden work). He is planning to treat the man's injury (seen also as forbidden work on the Sabbath). Then he goes right ahead and says, "Relax! Here's mud in your eye!" And it works! Praise God, it works! But they didn't praise God. They shut their eyes and said, "That's a no-no. You broke the rules."

Unhealthy Religion. Toxic Religion (wherever you find it) prevents us from seeing beyond ourselves and reaching beyond boundaries to do spontaneous acts of goodness and kindness wherever, whenever and however we can.

On the other hand, True Religion, Healthy Religion calls us to just the opposite. It calls us to open our eyes and see where there is a need and to see where God invites us to make a difference. True religion supports us. It nourishes us, and it sets us free. It actually triggers spontaneous acts of compassion, forgiveness and the powerful energy of God.

We need to allow Jesus to be our light, to be our way of seeing things, and to be our wisdom. Jesus shows us a God who forgives fools and Pharisees, and ourselves as well. Jesus says, “Relax. Here’s love in your eye!” Now go find ways to spread it everywhere you can. Amen.