

Reflection for the Fourth Sunday of Lent

Just as last weekend, our gospel passage today has been heavily abridged, the full story as recorded by St John being very lengthy. It is worth reminding ourselves as to why St John recorded these encounters and discussions in such fulsome detail. It was in order *“that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”* Using these long episodes St John wants to draw us into faith.

Before today’s gospel passage starts, Jesus has already described himself as *“the light of the world”* and declared that *“whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of Life.”*¹ He now illustrates this with the story of a man whose entire life has been lived in darkness because he was born blind and who now has to beg to support himself. He opens his eyes to allow light into his life for the very first time and he opens his heart and mind to the light of faith. However, what Jesus does is controversial because it is the sabbath day and activity on the sabbath was forbidden by the Law of Moses. This proves to be quite an obstacle for some in coming to faith in Jesus and the long gospel passage looks at how differing groups respond to the invitation of Jesus to step out of the darkness and into the light.

Firstly, we hear about *“his neighbours and those who had seen him before as a beggar”*. They are a divided group with some going so far as to deny that this is the man born blind at all. They don’t want to step into the light because they are frightened to get involved. Next, we hear about the Pharisees who assert that Jesus *“is not from God for he does not keep the Sabbath.”* Not part of our shortened version of the episode, they go on to say, *“we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.”* They are happy to stay in the lesser light of the Law of Moses. Again, omitted from the shortened version of the story, the parents of the man born blind are then sent for. While they testify that he is their son and that he was definitely born blind, they go on to say, *“how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age.”* Fear leads them to sit on the fence and prevents them from stepping into the light of Christ. Finally, the Pharisees interrogate the man born blind himself. He does not hesitate to step into the light and asserts that Jesus is *“a prophet”* and later he declares to Jesus: *“Lord, I believe, and he worshipped him.”*

Our Gospel today should prompt us to ask ourselves, what causes us to linger in the darkness and not step fully out into the light. What holds us back in our belief in Jesus as the Son of God. Fear? A reluctance to get involved? Being content with second best? With the man born blind who was brought into *“the light of life”* let us profess proudly, *“Lord, I believe [and] worship him.”*

¹ Jn 8:12