

Bishop's Reflection, March 19th, 2020

Today's Gospel tells the story of two simultaneous journeys: the blind man's journey into sight and some of the pharisees' journey into blindness, both stemming from the same miracle.

So often we think of miracles as the end of the story, the happy ending at the end of a long period of trial. But in John's account of the man born blind, this isn't the case at all. The man is glad to see, don't get me wrong, but he doesn't know what to make of it, nor do those around him. Instead, he becomes the centre of controversy, first among his neighbours, who argue if he is, in fact, the man they knew to be blind, then later by two groups of pharisees, who are divided among themselves regarding the one who cured them; even his parents don't know what to make of it.

Time and time again, the man has to answer the same set of questions and tell the same story. And, it is in re-telling of the story, and in the opposition that he faces, that the conclusions he draws go deeper and deeper, until he finally sees Jesus face to face and is asked: "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" When the man asks: "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him", he is finally ready for the truth, "You have seen him and the one speaking with you is he." Only then his eyes are opened, his eyes of faith that is. "'Lord, I believe,' and he worshipped him."

The journey to sight is not an easy journey. His parents disown him out of fear and those hostile to Jesus throw him out of the synagogue. In essence, he is forced to make a choice. He is forced to make up his mind, not so much by Jesus, but by the world, "Are you with him, or are you with us?" Reflecting on religious dialogue in our contemporary circumstances, it is sad to say, the attitude and dynamic haven't changed a lot among some.

Just as the account of the man born blind tells of the struggles of a man into faith, so it tells the contrasting story into blindness. Remembering there were those among the pharisees who were sympathetic towards Jesus, arguing: "how can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?", there was a group, hostile to Jesus, who continue the proceedings by questioning the parents, then calling the man in again. They are not open to listen, nor ready to learn; With each passing moment, they become more set in their ways. Here, too, we are given instruction, "take care to heed the voice of God."

Where are we in the journey? Are we still struggling, open to see, reaching out to greater sight, or do we have our minds made up, unwilling to acknowledge the evidence, hardened against the gift of faith. The Church's role is to bring people closer to Christ and to seek him with all of our hearts. In the man born blind we are given an example; despite the opposition he faces, he remains true Christ and what God has done for him, and is led to greater faith.