

## Homily for the Fourth Sunday of Lent – 19/3/23

Today's Gospel conjures up the classic story of two people

looking at a litre jug containing 500 mls of water:

*to the optimist it's half-full, to the pessimist it's half empty:*

the observable data hasn't changed;

**it's the inner perspective, the inner sight, the INsight**

**which is different.**

And the story of *physical* sight being restored to the man in our Gospel passage is really a story about the miracle of **INsight**.

It's a beautifully told story:

although the man's *physical* sight is given to him *in a single action*,

his **inner sight** progressively develops.

When he was first asked who did this his answer was ‘the man called Jesus’.

*With more time to reflect on this encounter, at his second interview with the Pharisees his answer has evolved to : ‘he is a prophet’:*

**something the Pharisees don’t react to too well at all.**

We can only be glad that they weren’t around when he meets Jesus the second time:

**‘Lord, I believe!’ is his extraordinary cry.**

**‘LORD’; Adonai; Kyrios.**

It’s the divine name. The Jewish title reserved for God alone.

The man come a long way from seeing just ‘a man called Jesus’.

As we prepare for Easter this Gospel

can ask us *whether*, and where, **WE see and recognise Jesus.**

Remember that glass half-full:

the man once blind at first sees only a man called Jesus,

*it takes a journey of faith for him to come to recognise God in this man called Jesus.*

Jesus no longer walks the streets and towns of our cities in the same body

*as he did* in Palestine two thousand years ago,

**but he is most definitely walking the streets of our town and cities.**

The question is whether we have the *inner* sight to recognise him.

If we're honest, I think we'd all admit that when it comes to looking at the world and the people around us

we can have a tendency to see the glass half-empty:

seeing all too clearly the sin, the weaknesses, the selfishness, the cruelty,

in others, perhaps even in ourselves.

*We – perhaps most people -*

*have more in common with the man born blind than we'd like to admit.*

By contrast I'm reminded of the famous vision – and the words in which he expressed it

- of Thomas Merton,

a man of no faith, who found it, became a Cistercian monk

and one of the great mystics of the twentieth century.

He writes of how he stood at a busy city square, with the bustle of city life around him,

all the chaos of human existence:

“In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the centre of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realisation *that I loved all these people*, that they

were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation in a special world. . . .

This sense of liberation from an illusory difference was such a relief and such a joy to me that I almost laughed out loud. . . . I have the immense joy of being a human being, a member of a race in which God Himself became incarnate. As if the sorrows and stupidities of the human condition could overwhelm me, **now that I realise what we all are.** And if only everybody could realise this! But it cannot be explained. There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun.

Then it was as if I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts, the depths of their hearts where neither sin nor desire nor self-knowledge can reach, the core of their reality, the person that each one *is* in God's eyes. If only they could all see themselves as they really are. If only we could see each other that way all the time. There would be no more war, no more hatred, no more cruelty, no more greed. . . . But this cannot be seen, only believed and 'understood' by a peculiar gift."

It seems that Thomas Merton became the first cousin of the man born blind !

**In that moment able to recognise God in all the messiness of the world.**

Though we don't have to feel like second-class citizens;

like the Transfiguration this experience was for a moment;

*like the disciples the experience on the mountain had to give way to life down on the plain.*

But the experience would have coloured life down on the plain;

*Merton would have carried that moment of vision with him  
back into the nitty-gritty of life.*

That second meeting of the man born blind with Jesus  
was also probably his last,

but he would never have been able to forget that he met God  
in a scruffy itinerant yokel from Nazareth.

And our own Lenten challenge is to reflect on those moments in our own life

**when we've had our own glimpses of God,**

*to nurture and to treasure them,*

**and to allow them to keep changing and converting us,**

so that *we see people differently*, act towards them differently,

**speak of them and to them differently,**

are a people of hope, not cynicism, with regard to humanity;

seeing ourselves and others, as Merton saw at the corner of Fourth and Walnut,

walking around shining like the sun.

*Fr Colin*