

Sunday Homily from Father Martin, 22nd March 2020

Seeing with the Eye of Your Heart

The story of the blind man in today's Gospel (John 9:1-41) is all about spiritual blindness and hardness of heart. The Pharisees feel threatened by Jesus because he challenges their religious certainties and is asking them to change, to see life in a new way, to love those outside the Law. However, they are unwilling to move from their fixed positions because this would involve a painful change in their way of seeing and understanding life. Unlike the Pharisees the blind man trusts completely in Jesus' goodness and his faith enables Jesus to heal him.

The Pharisees too have faith, but a faith which prevents them from seeing God at work in the world. They are imprisoned by their certainties. Because Jesus doesn't agree with their interpretation of the Law, they come to the conclusion that he cannot be from God. The blind beggar, as far as they are concerned, is a good for nothing, a nobody, a sinner, and therefore God couldn't possibly be interested in him. Their faith is founded on the certainties and the security which the Law gives, and as guardians of the Law they have become arrogant and self-righteous. Jesus, on the other hand, looks at the blind man with the eyes of love and cures him. The Pharisees can't see into the heart of the blind beggar. All they can see is someone who, by being healed on the Sabbath, has become an accomplice in the breaking the Law. Unlike Jesus their hearts are lacking in compassion.

We in our turn could ask ourselves the question: Do we see each other with the eyes of love, or do we focus on each other's defects and weaknesses? Do we look with compassion or with judgement? To see others with the eyes of love, with the eyes of Jesus, may demand a conversion on our part. In a celebrated passage Thomas Merton wrote about his moment of conversion in Louisville when he suddenly became aware of the hidden beauty in the hearts of strangers and passersby.

On entering the monastery, following his conversion to Catholicism, Merton was convinced that most people in the world were basically corrupt and enslaved by sin and wickedness. His attitude was not unlike that of the Pharisees towards the blind beggar. Then, after about eight years of complete seclusion, Merton made a trip outside the monastery to the neighbouring town of Louisville. To his amazement he

discovered that these ordinary people were full of beauty and goodness; his time in the monastery had purified his heart and empowered him to see people with the eyes of love: He writes: "... Now 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 they could all see themselves as they really *are*. If only we could see each other that way all the time." Merton's blindness had been cured; he was now learning how to see others as God saw them.

The question posed by Jesus in today's Gospel is one which we are also called to answer: "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" Do we believe that our blindness, whatever form or shape it may take, can be cured? Do we want to change? Do we have faith in Christ? Pope Benedict gives a wonderful definition of what true faith involves. He writes: "Faith is looking at Christ, entrusting oneself to Christ, being united to Christ ... to his life. And ... the life of Christ is love; hence to believe is to ... [become like] Christ and to enter into his love." (*Paul of Tarsus*, p.101)

The good news is that faith and love cannot be separated, one leads to the other. Like the blind man in today's Gospel story we too once more need to set out with new sight on our journey of faith. Our renewed friendship with Christ will lead us deeper into his love, a love that will purify our sight and enable us to see the beauty hidden in the heart of everyone we meet. This time of communal isolation, when our habitual busyness has been put on hold, presents us, I think, with a *kairos* moment, an opportunity to be converted and to see each other with the eyes of faith, with the eyes of love. As the fox told the Little Prince in Saint-Exupéry's renowned fable: "And now here is my secret, a very simple secret: It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye."

Let us give thanks in to-day's Eucharist for the gift of faith, the gift of new sight which enables us to say with the blind beggar: "I only know that I was blind and now I can see."