



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

4th Sunday of Lent - Year A

I was blind and now I see

Readings: *1 Samuel 16:1, 6-7, 10-13, Ps 22, Ephesians 5: 8-14, John 9: 1-41*

It is fashionable these days, I understand, to confess to a wide range of addictions. In the spirit of the age then, let me come clean. I suffer from literary addictions. It's not an illness – it's simply a monumental failure of willpower. I find a good author and I simply have to read everything they ever wrote. I once read the entire Helen Dunmore corpus in an eight week summer burst. Aldous Huxley and Graham Greene were similar victims. Really good ones I return to years down the road from the first greedy encounter. I am currently five volumes in to revisiting Dickens.

It was no different when I was a schoolboy. I remember discovering H.G. Wells and burning through the entire canon. My burst of 'mainlining' Wells always returns to me when I hear today's Gospel. Wells wrote a long short story called 'The Country of the Blind'. The tag line was the proverb, 'In the country of the blind the one-eyed man is king'.

Wells' dystopian parable envisages the fate of the sighted man who falls into the valley of the blind. Far from becoming king, the man who can see reality is shunned, mocked, persecuted, conspired against and hunted out of the community. Wells wrote this as an atheistic socialist but his friend

and literary rival, G.K. Chesterton, would have been forgiven for pointing out the remarkable parallels, in this story, to Jesus.

In today's Gospel, Jesus encounters the blind. One man has literally no physical vision. Most of the rest of the characters are spiritually blind. It is an enormous and complex story but there are certain salient features that we cannot ignore.

Jesus encounters the age old question about the link between sin and suffering. Who sinned? This man or his parents? Jesus has little time for the relentless mechanism of karma. In this man's suffering there is an opportunity for God's glory to be revealed. We all long for healing but we also know that the greatest healing comes from the suffering of the sinless one on the Cross. It is why we can, as believers, offer our suffering with His and why the prayers of the suffering have such power at the Mercy seat of the Father.

Second. This healing is a most intimate miracle. Jesus spits into the dust and makes an unlikely salve for the eyes of the sightless man. The dust out of which God's Word created Man is allied with the element that will signify the removal of original sin, the water of baptism. The humanity and the sacramental power of Jesus combine in this extraordinary way to liberate the birth blind supplicant. It is St. John Chrysostom who calls baptism, the 'bath of enlightenment'. Thus we are witnessing a spiritual as well as a physical healing.

But this healing is not completed until the man has carried out an obligation that Jesus lays on him. '*Go and wash in the Pool of Siloam*'. The word Siloam

means 'sent'. Just like the servants at the Wedding at Cana, we witness the miracle in the obedience. The sight is a gift of Jesus but it is completed as we make the journey. Our faith is fully revealed en route. We discover, we are enlightened by the sheer business of getting on with what Jesus has asked us to do. Followers of the Way, like all other men, begin in the darkness, stumbling around in sin. When we come to the Light of the World He anoints the eyes of our soul and we come to the Pool of Siloam, the place of washing and sending. As we are obedient our true sight is given and we bear witness to Him.

The miracle is not without opposition. The healing, the enlightenment is fiercely opposed by the Pharisees. They resent the mercy. They are resolutely NOT thankful. They are anti-eucharist. They are hard hearted. They try to trip the healed man up with some clever theological nonsense and he responds with the words that form part of the hymn, 'Amazing Grace'.

'All I know is that once I was blind and now I see.'

The best testimony is always simple. Tell the world what Jesus has done for you. And remember that, 'Just because the blind cannot see it, it does not mean that the sun does not shine'.

If I can invest an old toast with an even older meaning, 'Here's mud in your eye.' Courtesy of Jesus.