



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

4th Sunday of Lent-Year A-March 22nd 2020

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

I suppose the first thing that strikes you in reading today's Gospel passage, in the context of our current crisis where we are isolating and distancing ourselves to thwart the deadly virus, is what a health and safety nightmare Jesus is. Nothing could be more fraught or intimate or messy than His spitting on the dust and anointing the Blind Man's eyes. Jesus, we know, heals profoundly and intimately in one situation and yet by remote power (see the Centurion's Servant) in another.

What struck me, however, were the opening phrases of the extended Gospel account. The Blind Man had been born with this disability and the disciples want to know who sinned, the blind man or his parents.

The association of sickness with sin is nothing new.

You may remember a few years ago when a famous English football manager got into trouble for, essentially, espousing the doctrine of Karma i.e. 'you get what you deserve'. Such a concept is alien to our thinking.

We are much more likely to line up with Oscar Wilde when he said: "The good end happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means." Many good people have suffered terribly. Many evil people have died in their beds. On the other hand we cannot escape the Biblical passages where mass plague is seen as a divine response to corporate sin

and disobedience. Nor can we pretend that lifestyle choices do not incur physical penalties. But we do not laugh at handicapped children because we rejoice at their 'punishment' or dance down the cancer wards shouting, 'You deserve it'. Such would be the doctrine of the demonic and have no place in the economy of redemptive love of God.

On reading the passage for today, my mind went back some five short years ago to one of our HCPT Children's Pilgrimages to Lourdes.

I had recently been diagnosed with Parkinson's and while, for the most part, I was dealing with the reality and the prospect well, there were some darker moments. At night, with our precious children, we went down to the Grotto – where Our Lady appeared to St. Bernadette. To the non-believer it may look no more than a nondescript cleft in the rock by a fast flowing river. Here is the promised spring of healing water – the Siloam ('sent') of our journey, the place of encounter from which we are 'SENT', restored and telling people about Jesus

We lit our candles and knelt, in the suffused darkness to pray. Once you get there you find the children don't want to leave. They will outstay you and outpray you any day of the week. With all the helpers in place and my duties done, I snuck off unobserved to a very dark corner and indulged myself in a little self-pity in the company of 'Mother'.

I'd like to be able to tell you that Our Lady appeared to me, told me all my troubles were over and that, having had a word with her Son, I was now healed. She did better than that. She did not exempt me from the Via Dolorosa or exclude me from the company of my Lord on the Calvary Road.

As I knelt, swathed in the night and in prayer, I felt a hand upon my shoulder. I turned and saw the little eight year old Downs Syndrome boy who served me at Mass every day that week. He had seen me, followed me, discerned my grief and come to pray for me. As we both stayed there for a bit in prayer, I realised that our Blessed Mother could not have given me a greater gift. Here was a boy who, from birth, had never

known what we call normality or rude health. A child who, in many other circumstances, would have been denied his very life, coming to minister to me – an old man who had enjoyed (then) sixty five years of physical wellbeing. He was the exemplar of the love of Jesus. He was the one who, in spite of or because of his frailties, recognised my need and reached out.

I had, I was reminded at that moment, nothing to complain about and everything to give thanks for. If I could bear the future indignities of suffering and disability with half the grace and dignity of my young friend, I would die a happy man. ‘Mother’, like any good mother, had dusted me down, set me back on my feet and sent me off to do the best I could with my disabilities and know that, even in them, God could use them to His glory.

Our Lady’s word to me was:

‘Get up and get on with it. You know He loves you and will not fail you’.

What a family we belong to.

For the rest, I shall always remember the hand on my shoulder of my little brother in Christ, messenger of Mary, compassionate disciple of Her Son.

All I know is that, ‘Once I was blind but now I see and I owe it all to Jesus