



4th Sunday in Lent Year A - Born Blind: A Metaphor for Modernity

Homily by Fr Robbie Low

Readings: 1 Samuel 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a, Psalm 23, Ephesians 5: 8-14, John 9:1-41

St John gives a great deal of space to relatively few stories about Jesus. This is because he sees in them more than the immediate circumstances might simply proclaim. We have the woman at the well, the raising of Lazarus and this extensive account of the healing of the Blind Man.

Jesus healed many blind so what is special about this one?

The man, we are told, is blind from birth. The theology of the day saw illness or affliction as a sign of sinfulness. So the disciples ask Jesus if he knew if the man was the sinner or his parents? Jesus tells them that neither is the answer. He is born blind so that the works of God might be displayed in him. This then provokes Jesus to continue by claiming, 'I am the Light of the World' – light being that extraordinary thing which is the first thing that the Word commands into being in the Genesis account of creation. Light is that mysterious thing by which all is revealed and seen. It is both invisible wave, ubiquitous and eternal, and the particle that manifests itself on encounter with matter.

Jesus then spits into the dust, made a mud paste and applied them to the eyes of the blind. He commands him to go and wash in the Pool of Siloam – which means ‘sent’. The miracle occurs. The man can now see.

There then follows a series of long and tiresome disputes with the pharisees and their pals about the identity of the man, the witness of his parents, the disobedience of Jesus in healing on the Sabbath etc.

The key facts should not be obscured by the subsequent disputes. The man himself responds, in exasperation, to the claims and counter-claims, that ‘All I know is that once I was blind and now I see.’

It is, of course, no accident that the dust of the earth, from which Adam was created, should be a tool of Christ’s healing. Nor is it mere coincidence that his cure should be effected by washing in the Pool of the SENT. This is the root of the same word as APOSTLE. Vision, sight, understanding, enlightenment come on the journey of obedience to Christ’s sending us.

In the man born blind, we see a metaphor for our generation. The children born to our generation and in our, once Christian, now post-Christian civilisation, have, on the whole, been born blind. They have no knowledge of the Light of the World. Their encounter with Christ, when it comes, is spectacular and deeply counter – cultural.

If this all seems a bit far-fetched then may I introduce you to a small but significant piece of research recently published by the Bible Society.

Entitled ‘The Quiet Revival’ it reports evidence from a huge survey it commissioned in 2025. Against a constant background of reports over the last twenty years outlining the decline of the Church in our land, it came up with rather different findings. I must preface this with a warning

that they are no cause for complacency or self-congratulation but they are, at last, a sign of hope.

Attendance at Church over the last five years is up 13%.

While the C of E retains the largest chunk, its market share has reduced from 41% to 34% while the Catholic share has risen from 23% to 31%.

Some 12% of the population now report as churchgoers compared with 8% a few years ago.

While over 65s remain the major element in attendance and 45-64 year olds show decline, the 18-44 yr olds show growth and in the 18-24 range a dramatic hike from only 4% to 16%.

In the 18-34 range Catholics have 41% of the business, Pentecostals 18%.

There is also little doubt that these figures are, in part at least, the result of the changing demographic of our communities and the impact of immigration.

The survey discovers that Church attenders are considerably more likely to be happy, fulfilled, purposeful, engaged in good works, generous to charity and so on.

What is going on here is the gradual and dawning recognition that a society which is predicated on materialism, a rejection of God, a blindness to the beauty and glory of the Faith holds decreasing attraction for a new generation challenged by the uncertainties of the world into which they were born.

We deserve no credit for this sudden and welcome turning of the tide but we must be alert to it and prepared to be as helpful, open, welcoming and encouraging to it as we can.

The young are tired of being blindsided by the culture and offered the depressing fruits of Social Darwinism and Marxist Materialism, they are looking for The Light. The least we can do is help them on their way.