

# Sunday Homily

## 4th SUNDAY OF LENT

22 MARCH 2020

YEAR A

DIVINE OFFICE WEEK IV

“One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”

John 9:25

### Illustration

One of the great riches of life is that we all have different ways of viewing the world. But a frequent problem for human beings is our mental “tunnel vision”, when we have a particular way of looking at things and cannot understand or accept alternative approaches. This can be true in the habits of our daily lives, with its “messages” from our childhood: clean your teeth after meals, eat your greens, or even don’t admit to anything! These are usually a mixture of the sensible, the quaint and the downright misleading.

We have a similar list for our deeper beliefs. The difficulty comes when we think our stance is absolutely right, without making sure that it is founded upon sound reflection and judgement. Without realising it, what we are doing is claiming our view is right because it is our view, rather than choosing it because it is right. The temptation is to assume that others are wrong, which is to devalue both them and their argument.

### Gospel Teaching

In Jesus’ time it was assumed that physical or mental disability was the result of some failure or sin perpetrated by the sufferer or their family. Jesus used the inaccuracy of this assumption to illustrate the deeper misunderstanding his listeners had of his own role and mission. Not only did Jesus heal the man born blind, but he did so on the sabbath.

The authorities had to declare such an action unacceptable. Being accomplished on the sabbath, when any work is forbidden, the action could not be from God. The man born blind was regarded as a sinner and, therefore, as a dishonest witness. The authorities were already committed to condemning Jesus and so anything in which he was involved would be turned into further evidence against him. Differences in their statements resulted in total contradiction. They were reduced to saying that what had happened could not have happened and certainly could not be recognised as valid because it infringed the Law. The blind man’s answer exposed very simply the inadequacy of their argument: “One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”

This story is not just about the blind man, but also about the prejudices that prevent the officials from recognising the true nature of Jesus and his actions. When the authorities asked at the end of the story whether Jesus was calling them blind, he replied that being blind does not matter. In itself it was a tragic but natural circumstance and carried no blame. In such a state, we would know we were blind, and we would yearn to be able to see. Guilt arises when we are interiorly blind, yet think we can see, and when we insist upon everyone else having to see the world from our own warped perspective.

## Application

Some of our prejudices can be harmless: dislike for particular food or music or art. The difficulty arises when we make our opinions absolute or when we are led into a misunderstanding of what is right or wrong because of it. One litmus test can be how far our views lead us to discriminate against others. In the Gospel story people with disabilities were considered not just second-class citizens, but sinners.

In our society such discrimination still exists, despite many attempts at legislating for equal rights and opportunities. Across society there are other groups who are the focus for discrimination. For example, women and ethnic minorities often experience it from some white males who regard themselves as the social norm – see some of the language commonly used to describe people in general: “men”, “mankind”, “brothers”. Many people cannot even understand how this creates an imbalance. To alter just this one fundamental prejudice in our society would demand profound changes in the way we think. It is one, among many, of the potential upheavals of our era, but Jesus implied that following him required us to change.

The crucial insight here is that the vision we think is clear can be impaired, and we must strive to see more clearly. With this attitude in mind we can become more open to what we do not at first see or comprehend, rather than jealously guarding our own corner. The Gospel is a dynamic message leading us always towards the light of truth. Struggling through the thickets of our prejudices, assumptions and misunderstandings is always humbling and certainly a very seasonal Lenten discipline and offering.