

SERMON ON THE HEALING OF THE MAN BORN BLIND, SUNDAY, MAY 24, 2020

In order to properly understand the Gospel of St. John, we must consider his narrative as one complete story. Each chapter and each scene leads to the next story, the next event. They are all interconnected. Each event is an extension, a clarification, a continuing emphasis and further explanation of the scene which precedes it. In other words, it is difficult to get the correct sense of what is going on if we look at each story in this Gospel as an isolated incident. As I said, each scene leads to the next scene, and so on, until we reach the climax and the end of this Gospel. Therefore, in order to get a correct understanding and sense of what is going on when Jesus heals the blind man, let's take a look at what was going on right before this. A discourse is going on between Jesus and the Pharisees. Jesus is telling them that He has been sent by the Father, that He knows the Father because He has seen the Father. Right away there is a theme of sight, not with physical eyes, but the eyes of knowing, the eyes of recognition, understanding and belief. Jesus tells them that the Father has sent Him to free them from the bondage of sin; that if they listen to His Word they will know the truth and the truth will free them from their sin. In other words, if they believe in Jesus as the Son of the Father and pay heed to His words, they will see with the eyes of their souls and their understanding will increase. They will understand the nature of God and the nature of sin. They will better understand themselves and through this understanding they will achieve freedom from what oppresses them, from what causes them disharmony and inner turmoil. Understanding will free them from making bad choices and from going down paths that lead to destruction and not to salvation. The Pharisees refuse to have an open mind, they have closed their hearts and they refuse to let the light of Christ penetrate their spirit and soul and bring illumination and sight to the spiritual eyes of their souls. To use the language of Scripture, they have "hardened their hearts." They tell Jesus that He has a demon. Jesus has been trying to tell them that He is the Light of the world sent into the world by His Father. The Pharisees say that their father is Abraham. Jesus tells them that He knows Abraham better than they do, because He has seen Abraham. Again the theme of sight. They say, "You are not yet fifty, how could you have seen Abraham?," understanding Jesus in a purely carnal way and thinking that he is speaking only about physical sight. Jesus answers them by saying "Before Abraham was, I AM." "I AM" is the name of the God of Israel, "Yahweh," the name so holy that it is forbidden to even utter it. Jesus tells them that He is God. At this point the Pharisees lift stones with the intent to kill Jesus for what they deem to be blasphemy because of their unbelief. And that leads us into the next scene which is the Gospel we read today about Jesus healing a man born blind. There is a dilemma: who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind? For Jesus, the physically blind are not hindered from receiving the Light of Christ, because Jesus says that "As long as I am in the world I am the Light of the world," and physical sight is unnecessary in order to see and understand with the soul and the heart the Light of Christ. Physical sight is not necessary in order to receive inner illumination. Jesus makes a cake of mud from dirt and spittle and places it on the blind man's eyes. This is reminiscent of God when He created man from the earth. It is as if Jesus is creating the blind man's eyes anew and creating perfect new eyes with physical sight. Jesus sends the man to the Pool of Siloam and tells him to wash his eyes there. Now we have a theme of "being sent." Siloam in Hebrew means "sent." Jesus is the Light sent by the Father so that we may see with the eyes of our hearts. The Pharisees tell Jesus, "Who are you? You have no credentials? By what authority do you do these things?" The Father authorizes Jesus, the Father bears witness and it is the Father who sent Jesus into the world. All of this is symbolized by Jesus sending the blind man to wash in the Pool of Siloam. Then the Pharisees accuse Jesus of breaking the Sabbath because He made clay on the Sabbath. The narrative of John's Gospel is like a trial, with witnesses, prosecutors and lawyers. Jesus is the defendant who is on trial. Everyone who reads John's Gospel follows the trial through the entire narrative. Everyone who reads the Gospel is the jury. At the end of the Gospel, the reader must make a choice and decide, is Jesus a blasphemer like the Pharisees say that He is? Is He someone who is deluded? Is

Jesus just another phony, or is Jesus genuine and the real thing? In today's Gospel story we see more testimony, more witnesses and the case is building that Jesus truly is the Light of the world sent into the world by God the Father. The truth is validated by a man born blind, his neighbors and his parents and the testimony that they give as witnesses to this truth. This is the question for everyone who reads this Gospel: "Are we going to harden our hearts and close our ears like the Pharisees, or are we going to listen to this testimony and believe and understand that Jesus is the Light of the World? May the Light of Christ penetrate our souls and shine in all of our hearts so that we may see and understand the truth. May this Divine Light free all of us from the bondage of sin, and may we follow the one path that Christ leads us on so that we may ultimately receive the great gift that God has prepared for all of us who love and believe in Him, the gift of eternal life. Amen.