

I was blind but now I see

EWTN HOMILY - February 19, 2014

In the weekday ferial liturgies of the Church, we have been hearing from Mark, the shortest and perhaps most straightforward of the Gospels. Interestingly, the Letter of James, paired with Mark through these last two weeks of February, contains a straightforward boldness as well.

One characteristic of the Gospel of Mark is a repeated theme of **secrecy**, arising in that Jesus would dazzle the disciples with something or even perform an astounding miracle that others would already see quite openly. But then Our Lord follows up with “tell no one about this,” or as we hear today to the blind man whom he cured outside of the crowd “Do not even go into the village, go right home.” In other places He even commands the demons to be silent in the context of knowing his Name. It is as if he is playing down the miracle. For something else. For something more, actually.

After all there were other miracle workers in those days. We read about one Simon from Caesarea who had the folks in Jerusalem spellbound, as recorded by Josephus the historian. But Jesus does more. And the secret is part of it, as if to say that **He, not the miracles** are where you need to look. Still, it is through the miracles, that we have a sure entrance to Jesus. Just don't get too infatuated with them that we miss the real LIGHT the blind man receives: **the gift of Christ the light of the world.**

Today's Gospel verse reads: “***May the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ enlighten the eyes of our hearts...***” Can you imagine what would have registered in the “eyes of the heart” of the man who in a few short moments of compassion and power Jesus had brought to see? So the interplay of **secrecy** and **broad daylight** is tantalizing. How can a man who has just had a world of sight opened to him be given a command to squelch this magnanimous miracle?

One explanation for the secret is that Jesus was gradually imparting Who He was according to His plan, and not hurriedly. In John's Gospel that is even clocked as it were: at Cana, in response to the request of Our Lady "My time has not yet come." But at the Last Supper: "My hour has now come." And in that case there is further reference to darkness, as a sort of blindness. Some commentators see Mark's Gospel as basically the story of the Passion with a large introduction. Of course all the Gospels have the Passion as the magnet for all the other stories from Jesus life from which their explanation is drawn.

The peculiarity of secrecy in the Gospel of Mark, though, is coupled with the Lord gradually raising the disciples' awareness and yet being baffled at their inability to figure out who he is. Did they "get" the miracles, and how far into Jesus' ministry did they have to go before understanding? did they reach? The mantra of "do you still not understand" sends shivers up their already cold spines. The senses seemed dulled to the miracle. Mark even states after the Resurrection they did not understand! Blindness also.

There is something to be noted about the blind man's recovery – in stages. And we note that he was not blind from birth to be able to liken what he saw of people to walking trees before Jesus laid hands on his eyes a second time to then see everything distinctly. How would he otherwise know what walking trees looked like! Was this a reflection of the disciples' gradual sluggish advance in faith? What does it say of ours?

For all of us this Gospel exploits a reference to secrecy and sluggish faith and even blindness. We can blind ourselves, and generally that comes from 1) lack of awareness 2) lack of perspective and 3) the deliberate refusal to see.

“I once was blind but now I see” is the familiar line of *Amazing Grace*. Once a slavetrader, John Newman rejoiced in his conversion as his spiritual blindness is removed. An experience of a new lease on life. But to get there one has to find the Healer. One has also to step out and be counted. Faith and the miracles around Jesus are the preliminaries, essential, but they are not Jesus. And there has to be a response to His Call. “Do you will that I heal you?” he asks in the other blind man passage in chapter 10, Jesus’ last miracle before the Passion.. And we say, well, of course he wants to be healed! Jesus didn’t need to be asked. But the blind man needed to ask Him. So often that is missing. Do we ask for clarity of judgment, for the conversion of people who are doing wrong, or any other thing?

We need to ask for healing. Not just pray in general. And ask with determination. *Focusing* is important, even when confessing sins, in the powerful sacramental forum of healing. Help me Lord to get over this sin, or in prayer for others: help her Lord to turn to her spouse, for him to overcome pornography. Our petitions need be specific. So the blind man wanted sight. Simple, clear, but STATED. In the second blind man cure in Mark 10, the man makes it very clear that is what he wants. It is a lesson for all.

Let’s look at those three areas of blindness - *lack of awareness, lack of perspective, deliberate refusal to see.*

The first is lack of knowledge. Much of evangelizing is about bringing the message of the Gospel to people who are generally willing to understand and believe. They may be Catholic already and have lapsed, or simply have not heard the basics of the faith we cherish. It doesn’t take much to direct our friends to good Catholic books, CDs, DVDs. We ourselves don’t want to be blind leading the blind, so we should always be disposed to learning. Meet people where they are their faith journey and stretch them. Here at

EWTN this marvelous communications network which in her foresight and prudence Mother Angelica founded a third of a century ago continues to promote in addition to round the clock TV, voluminous CDs DVDs and printed materials that tell us systematically about the Faith, and get it across in daily language. Also in the pro-life area we at *Priests for Life* have sensible and compassionate materials about every aspect of the abortion issue imaginable, and a significant amount on euthanasia, stem cell and eugenics. We relate life to liturgy and priests, deacons and liturgical directors can get this as an app or on line at priestsforlife.org. We collaborate with Catholic and non-Catholic groups, relating these life-death issues to every aspect of our society. And healthful programs on the family from a Catholic perspective are growing in number.

A good number of you have already cultivated your minds with good Catholic reading coming from EWTN and Priests for Life. And listening to Catholic Radio in the car through satellite or smart phone connection - while keeping your hands free, please - is a way to bring eye-openers to the workplace. You may not yet be able to sound off before your co-workers the peace and joy of what you just heard in the car coming to work, but listening and learning makes rush hour a stimulating rather than a nerve-racking experience will refresh you to convey your peace and joy to others. There is something enjoyable in hearing the truth come to life. The mind too looks for pleasure that is wholly decent and good. These are wonderful resources, and there are so many others. One of the great perks in coming here to EWTN is to meet and mix with international speakers and authors that are fired up with evangelization - putting flesh on the Gospel in one's specific uniquely crafted call to ministry, locally or universally. And the Word was made Flesh! And dwells among us. Through those he has called to lead a renewal of faith and in changing lives for the better. The tragedy is that most Catholics don't pry open the treasure house of

wisdom from across the ages. They don't know what they are missing. You are obviously opening the lid at least because you are listening to Holy Mass on Eternal Word Television Network. Not the sometimes word, not the opinion word, but the Eternal Word, Who in the Mass becomes Flesh and continually does dwell among us! Praise God!

2) *Secular relativism loses sense of life perspective* . Blindness obstructs anyone's perspective. A blind person cannot assuredly place an object in its proper place nor register ordered relationships. Groping in the dark causes confusion and alarm. Every nation has different ways by which the faith ought to be handed down and the faithful, all of us need to hold this wisdom treasure as curators, not just the clergy, to pass down to our children and to enliven the faith of others. In the secular perspective of things there is a peculiar blindness and obtuseness against the overarching immensity of the Church and its treasure. Mention *treasure* and one is reminded of the riches of gold adorning some cathedrals and like Judas they would suggest stripping them of their gold leafed art and giving that to the poor. One can argue the ineffectiveness of this, as the funds would soon be gone. Helping the poor comes rather from the pockets of worshippers, not from stripping the church. And that generosity needs to be constantly cultivated. In Roman times when the deacon St Lawrence was ordered by the Roman prefect to turn over the church's treasure to him, he instead collected the poor and brought *them* to him. Lawrence was barbecued alive for that but his witness reminds us over and over of real treasure, God's people. And the treasure of the poor. Pope Francis reminds us of that need to smell the sheep, but not to desecrate God's temple. The art and gold leaf are for the poor as well and lift the heart precisely because the gold leaf is first and foremost for the Lord.

As magnificent and unsurpassable as the lofty heaven-reaching cathedrals are, and yet with no affect on a blind man, they are not the ultimate treasure. That is the Lord Himself and the center of the grandest basilica or the simplest church hut or battlefield outcrop for a temporary table holds that Treasure, that the Eternal Word come down once again in the billions of Masses offered since Calvary. It's a perspective which a secular world view stifles and stumbles over, even though it is often sifting through the Creator's scientific evidence and detailed ordering. The Word is made Flesh.

In my Rome days, I remember giving our college choristers a tour through St Peter's Basilica in Rome. As you know perspective is really revealed in such an experience. Looking from the back to the front.....

So it is with the *history of the Church*, too much beyond our comprehension, even for the greatest of historians, to fathom completely the perspective of the Church's annals, the rise of hospices, of hospitals, of schools, of shared government, yes, even of discovery as any fair survey of a long list of scientists and explorers would display. There is something greater than the sum of its parts, as there surely is between a living body and a corpse. And the ingredient is invisible but it is in *the visible*. The church for all its warts and ugly marks - apart from the saving birth marks from the Cross - for all its sin and past wars, will always have that invisible in the visible: Jesus Christ and His Eternal promise, which puts a perspective on life that no other godless imagery can.

About this loss of perspective - This week CNN was covering a young woman who has come forth claiming to be a serial murderer apparently just for the heck of it and now given herself up to authorities. Now much more needs to be explored in this bizarre case. She just wants to get it off her,

she says. Yesterday we talked about the results of temptations which themselves spring from inner misplaced urges in our fallen nature. But what do you make of this one? What does this forlorn young lady want? Is it really clearing her conscience? Is she craving notoriety as so many others who have not savored a sane perspective? When people cannot state that there is such a thing as absolute truth, then everything becomes absolutely relative. Everything becomes democratized, equaled out, where nobody can say for sure anything is any more worthwhile than others. Any ***hierarchy of value*** is not only lost but sometimes turned upside down. Ladybugs right here in Birmingham were given a place of honor in a hotel, warning people that they are legally protected. And yet human pre-borns can be discarded with legal impunity – if they are not wanted.

Lastly there is a blindness that is ***chosen***, ironically: a very lethal ***arrogance of ignorance***, bits of which can be found in all of us, but when it grows to take over life's attitude and the way one is driven, this is playing with fire. Insistence on evil is like removing the eye and making vision impossible. There may come a day when that eye is lost forever. I know this seems in complete literary turn around from what Jesus says: *if your eye is the cause of your wrongdoing, gouge it out lest the whole body is cast into hell* (Gehenna). We just heard this in Sunday's gospel. But remember there Jesus has ***identified the evil source***, not so much condoning anyone throwing away the eye as a good organ, but if one can't control what one does, one needs to take drastic steps. So He is not saying to mutilate the body. Today he would say, if you can't stop looking at porn on your state of the art stealthy computer screen, throw away the computer but perhaps not the screen. He locates the problem and attacks it. The literary use conveys the dire extreme that one needs to resist to avoid sin. Put another way: "what does it gain a man to gain the whole world and lose his immortal soul?" - Very sober words to consider and act upon with determination.

With the arrogance of ignorance, however, one works oneself into a spiritual deceit that insists on one's own viewpoint regardless of evidence against it. In contrast to what Jesus was saying, the spiritual blindness that results from this sorry state disables the person to focus on the evil which the self has endorsed. In the core motivation for persisting in ignorance, it's not the ignorance that is attractive, but only as a shield to avoid a conscientious search for the truth just below the surface a false sense of self-righteousness propping up a misguided judgment. All sin contains the element of blindness which modifies the evil to look attractive. But this persistence makes ***oneself*** the sole judge of what is good or evil. Truth is the goal of the intellect properly directed. But the yearning for truth is sparked by the will, and the avoidance of truth is also the misuse of the will.

Beyond our own receiving spiritual sight, which the gifts of the Holy Spirit continue to brighten our lives with wisdom and understanding, we are commanded to move beyond ourselves to help others, as Pentecost moved newly and divinely enlightened Apostles to the streets of Jerusalem to bring Christ the Light of the World to others and relay that light through the ages.

May the Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ enlighten the eyes of our hearts that we may know what is the hope that belong to his call. O Christ our Light, that we may see! And in seeing, light others' path on the Way!