

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Fourth Sunday in Lent
March 15, 2015

+

Just prior to today's gospel Our Lord Jesus had emerged from a tense confrontation within the Temple precincts and had narrowly escaped being stoned to death. On His way out of the Temple we are told the Lord "Saw a man which was blind from his birth." Anyone else would have been completely occupied with a personal and urgent desire to get as far away from the place in the shortest amount of time! But not only did God Incarnate stop and show immediate compassion, but also determined to use this cure to seek once again the conversion of the very people who minutes earlier had been eager to murder Him. Saint John's Gospel recalls Christ as *totally fearless*. And as Bishop Allue reminded us Friday evening, the Lord never lost His thirst for the salvation of souls.

In St. John's Gospel the impression is that we have an eyewitness account. That was also true in the encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well. The narrative shows qualities of detail only an eyewitness could provide. Saint John must have been *on the spot*. The blind man's healing involved props and also a courageous action on his own part. This was not the Lord's usual method of operation. The healing was in the will of Christ, as it always is, and not in how He performed it. The healing power was not in the eye salve made of clay, or in washing in the pool of Siloam. On other occasions it was a word from Christ or His saying, "I do will it" that signaled the healing, and sometimes He did this from *a remote location*. So why then this time was there an anointing of the eyes? And why did Jesus give the instruction to wash in Siloam?

The answer is that the Lord does for us *what we need*. A sturdy old understanding of Almighty God applies here. The prophet Samuel announced to Jesse in Bethlehem "The Lord does not see as man sees, but looks on the heart." (1 Sam. 16:7) Jesus had never before seen this blind beggar in the Temple precincts. But He knew what was needed for the blind man's soul.

And what was needed? This man needed to be made uneasy with his blindness. Just as we need to be made uneasy with our sins. *And then healed*. The clay eye salve actually *sealed* the man's eyes rather than open them. Any residual bit of light was blocked out. Christ seemed to be *destroying* rather than restoring the beggar's vision! Added to that, the man was instructed to go through the city in

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Fourth Sunday in Lent
March 15, 2015

+

this condition and wash in Siloam. How *silly* and *pathetic* a sight this must have looked to the Jerusalem crowd! None of the Old Testament saints had ever restored a man's sight. This blind beggar was on a fool's errand for a man with a Galilean accent and who had just missed being stoned by the crowd in the Temple precincts. But the Gospel of Jesus Christ has no interest in the derisive snickering of the crowd!

Almighty God has a way of using foolish things, and weak and despised things, for bringing light to a darkened world. The greatest of these weak things is the Cross of Christ. But among the lesser things used are dirt and spit making clay, and "a man become a fool that he may be wise." (1 Cor. 3:18) Those are not my words. They are Saint Paul's words, and he knew a thing or two about what it meant to fight against Christ, be struck blind for three days, and then led by the hand into a city he had planned to impress with his zeal and brilliant intellect.

Christ offered not only His power and grace to the beggar. *He offered a duty to be done by him.* "Go wash in the pool of Siloam." And the blind beggar went, therefore, looking so much like a fool to the world, but confident of Christ's power to save. Doesn't Christ Jesus often treat us this way? How often we are perplexed before we are illumined! Christ so often leaves a soul in intellectual darkness for a time before He grants such a vision of truth that by comparison we seem to have been blind up until now. How often the crowd gets in the way!

We no longer use clay eye salve. Today the pool of Siloam is a dry archeological site. The remedy for our blind souls is to wash in the Precious Blood of the Redeemer, and by penitence and the pastoral care of His Church, to come to behold Jesus with a clearness we have never had up until now. The man born blind, having been with Jesus, could declare to the whole world, "That, whereas I was blind, now I see." Those words are part of the testimony and witness for each and every follower of Jesus Christ.

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Fourth Sunday in Lent
March 15, 2015

+