

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Fourth Sunday of Lent
March 11, 2018

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Saint John's Gospel always means more than it says. Today's account of the restoring of sight to the blind man is a case in point. The Lord Jesus had just emerged from a tense confrontation within the Temple precincts. He had narrowly escaped from being stoned to death. On His way out of the Temple "He saw a man which was blind from his birth." Anyone else would have been completely occupied with the urgent personal desire to get away from that place as quickly as possible! But not only did Jesus stop and show immediate compassion for the blind man, He also used this cure to seek once more the conversion of the very people who minutes earlier had been eager to murder Him! St John's Gospel remembers Jesus as totally fearless, and as never giving up His desire for the salvation of souls.

As with last Sunday's gospel account of the Samaritan woman at the well, the narrative here shows qualities of detail only an eyewitness could provide. The evangelist, or his source, must have been *on the spot*. Notice also the unique use of props involved in this healing and the required courageous action on the part of the man born blind. The healing, of course, is in the will of Christ and not in how He performed it. The healing was not in the eye salve made of clay or in going to Siloam to wash in the pool. On so many other occasions it is *a word from the Lord*, His saying "I do will it," that signals the healing. Jesus sometimes did this from *a remote location* far from the beneficiary. So then why in this case was their anointing of the eyes and an instruction to wash in Siloam?

The answer is that when the Lord does intervene, He does for us *what we need*. The prophet Samuel pronounced to Jesse at Bethlehem "The Lord does not see as man sees, but looks on the heart." (1 Sam. 16:7) The Lord Jesus had never before seen this blind beggar found in the Temple precincts. But He knew what was needed for the blind man's soul.

For reasons known only to Jesus this man needed to be made *uneasy* with his blindness. You and I need to be made uneasy with our sins. Then comes the restoration and healing. So the eye salve, which was a clay paste held together by saliva, actually *sealed* the man's eyes rather than opening them. If there had been any residual bit of light it was blocked out. The Divine ophthalmologist seemed to

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be destroying rather than restoring the beggar's vision. And then in this condition the man was instructed to find his way through the city and wash in Siloam. Think 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 named Jesus who had just missed being stoned by the crowd in the Temple area. But St John's Gospel leaves all that unsaid and has no interest at all 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 is the Cross of Christ. But among the lesser things used are dirt and spit making clay paste, and "a man become a fool that he may be wise." (1 Cor. 3:18) Those are not St John's words but St Paul's. He knew a thing or two about what it meant to fight against Christ, to be struck blind for three days, and 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 for the beggar's healing, but also *a duty to be done by him*. "Go wash in the pool of Siloam." And he went, therefore, looking so much like a fool to the world, but, trembling yet hoping and trusting in Christ's power to save. Doesn't Christ Jesus often treat us this way? How often we are perplexed before we are illumined! How often the crowd gets in the way. 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 to now.

We no longer use clay eye salve. The pool of Siloam is long gone. 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, come to behold Jesus with a clearness we have never had up until now. The man born blind, having been with Jesus, declared to the world "That, whereas I was blind, now I see." Those words are part of the vocabulary and witness of every follower of Jesus Christ.