

All men make mistakes, but a good man yields when he knows his course is wrong, and repairs the evil. The only crime is pride.

Antigone / Sophocles, c.497/6 – winter 406/5 BC

Related topics

For further study:

Eternal life; sin; cross; baptism; soteriology; Jesus the Christ; paschal mystery; death; reconciliation

Closing Prayer

God, whose face we long to see,
you have looked upon us in love,
and with the anointing of your Spirit
have opened our eyes to the insight of faith.
Let us not be afraid to acknowledge before the world
that Christ is the world's true light,
and bestir us to seek the fruits of the light
in everything that is good and right and true.
We ask this in the name of Jesus,
who is one with you and the Holy Spirit,
now and for ever.

Celebrating the Christian Year 2, Lent 4, Year A²

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² *Celebrating the Christian Year* / compiled by Alan Griffiths. – vol. 2. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 2005.

The Fourth Sunday of Lent

Principal Service readings

1 Samuel 16.1-13	David is chosen to be king
Psalms 23	The Lord is my shepherd
Ephesians 5.8-14	Live as children of light
John 9.1-41	Jesus heals the man born blind

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

Jesus heals a man born blind

¹As Jesus walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ²His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' ³Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. ⁴We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.' ⁶When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, ⁷saying to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. ⁸The neighbours and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, 'Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?' ⁹Some were saying, 'It is he.' Others were saying, 'No, but it is someone like him.' He kept saying, 'I am the man.' ¹⁰But they kept asking him, 'Then how were your eyes opened?' ¹¹He answered, 'The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, "Go to Siloam and wash." Then I went and washed and received my sight.' ¹²They said to him, 'Where is he?' He said, 'I do not know.'

¹³They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, 'He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.' ¹⁶Some of the Pharisees

said, 'This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.' But others said, 'How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?' And they were divided. ¹⁷So they said again to the blind man, 'What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.' He said, 'He is a prophet.'

¹⁸The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight ¹⁹and asked them, 'Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?' ²⁰His parents answered, 'We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; ²¹but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.' ²²His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³Therefore his parents said, 'He is of age; ask him.'

²⁴So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, 'Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.' ²⁵He answered, 'I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.' ²⁶They said to him, 'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?' ²⁷He answered them, 'I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?' ²⁸Then they reviled him, saying, 'You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.' ³⁰The man answered, 'Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. ³²Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.' ³⁴They answered him, 'You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?' And they drove him out.

³⁵Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' ³⁶He answered, 'And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.' ³⁷Jesus said to him, 'You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.' ³⁸He said, 'Lord, I believe.' And he worshipped him. ³⁹Jesus said, 'I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.' ⁴⁰Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, 'Surely we are not blind, are we?' ⁴¹Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, "We see", your sin remains.'

John 9.1-41 NRSV¹

¹ New Revised Standard Version Bible is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Comments and Questions

A number of themes and contrasts are evident in this passage: light versus darkness, sight versus blindness, knowing versus not knowing, the healing effect of water, wilful ignorance and demonstrable proof. Can you think of any others?

How would you answer the question: 'whose fault is it that the man is blind?' It is easy to think that bad things happen to bad people but we know it is not always true. Jesus' response is far from blaming anyone. Why does Jesus heal the man on the Sabbath, when he must have known it would annoy the Pharisees?

The man who has been born blind declares his healer as a prophet but the Pharisees choose to deny his testimony and the change that is before their eyes. In our lives we sometimes face difficult decisions about what to believe, or who to believe. When we are faced with differences, which might have further implications, what do we do? Do we cling to our existing beliefs regardless, or are we open to change? Are we willing to have a change of heart, and to be guided into a more Christian or spiritual understanding? It is perhaps not something we can do alone, but we need some help.

Quotations

1

Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself.

Leo Tolstoy, 1828–1910

2

Why do you go away? So that you can come back. So that you can see the place you came from with new eyes and extra colors. And the people there see you differently, too. Coming back to where you started is not the same as never leaving.

A hat full of sky / Terry Pratchett. 1948–2015