

**HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE,  
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
HOLY MASS FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT  
“FRANCIS AT 10” CONFERENCE  
ST. AMBROSE UNIVERSITY  
DAVENPORT, IOWA  
MARCH 18, 2023**

Your Eminence Cardinal Tobin, Your Excellency Bishop Zinkula; Dear Priests, Religious, and Faithful; Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Today’s Gospel is about a blind man who is given physical sight, and who gradually gains the spiritual “vision” of faith: he believes that Jesus is the Messiah, and he worships him.

Today’s Gospel is also about some of the Pharisees, who are offered the same opportunity to believe in Jesus, but who refuse to do so, and who remain in the blindness of their sin.

“I came into this world for judgment,” says the Lord, “so that those who do not see might see, and those who do see might become blind” (JN 9:39).

**To be disciples of Jesus, we must be cured of our “blindness” and come to see reality in all its dimensions. To achieve such “vision” we must not reject perspectives that challenge our own existing ideas; but rather, we must persevere in a synodal dialogue until the Holy Spirit reveals a united path forward.**

“Realities are greater than ideas” (*EVANGELII GAUDIUM*, 231). The reality which confronts the people in today’s Gospel passage is the fact that Jesus has healed a man who was born blind. While some of the actors in this drama may want to deny it, the facts are as plain as day: this man was blind before, and now he sees.

The rest of the drama is built around the question: *How do we respond to this reality?* “It is unheard of that anyone ever opened the eyes of a person born blind” (v. 32). How are we to interpret this reality? What dialogue needs to take place between this reality and our ideas? When confronted with the reality of this healing, how might our ideas need to change? What action must we take based on this new reality? And most importantly: *Who is the man who has worked this miracle?*

These questions, with which the people of Jesus’ day were confronted, are also pertinent questions for people of every age, including our own day. What are we to do when we are confronted by realities that challenge our understanding and our previous experience?

Everyone in this Gospel scene is confronted with the healing of the blind man: the man himself, his neighbors, the Pharisees, the man’s parents. Some of the neighbors cannot quite believe that the healed man is the same person who was previously a beggar. The man’s parents are afraid of the religious consequences of witnessing to the power of Jesus, and so they deflect the Pharisees’ questions.

As for the healed man, his response to the reality of his healing is gradual. From the outset – *and this is key* – he acknowledges the reality as it simply is: “One thing I do know. I was blind and now I see” (v. 25). Next, as the Pharisees interrogate him with an attitude of hostility and distrust, he declares that the man who healed him is a prophet (cf. v. 17); then, that he comes from God (cf. v. 33); and finally, the healed man confesses Jesus as the Messiah and worships him (cf. v. 38).

The response that some of the Pharisees give to the reality of the healing is much different. They denounce Jesus for breaking the sabbath. Without even asking the man what it is like to be healed, without sharing the joy of his newfound sight, they immediately begin an interrogation. They try to manipulate the man into denouncing Jesus. But with praiseworthy candor, the man only attests to what he has seen and experienced. He gives witness to reality. He is not yet a believer, but his openness to the truth is preparing him for the gift of faith.

Ironically, the Pharisees' interrogation, which is intended to manipulate the man into being a witness *against* Jesus, only leads him to become more and more a witness *for* Jesus. Having received the Pharisees' abuse, the man is expelled from their presence. But this is precisely the moment when he is ready for his definitive encounter with Jesus. Jesus approaches him, reveals himself as the Son of Man, and by believing, the man goes from physical sight to the spiritual "vision" of faith.

Speaking about this Gospel passage, Pope Francis said: "The healed blind man...is the image of every baptized person, who immersed in Grace has been pulled out of the darkness and placed in the light of faith" (ANGELUS, 22 MARCH 2020).

If we are to have this experience of healing and enlightenment, then we must let Jesus address our own "blind spots". As members of a Church journeying together – in which we have differing ideas that are difficult to reconcile – each of us must be willing to admit: *I do not see everything clearly*. And so, like the healed blind man, we must begin by acknowledging reality – including realities that challenge our pre-conceived ideas.

When conflict exists – as it so often does among members of the Church – we should not assume that the difference between two ideas is necessarily a contradiction. We must be open to the possibility that two ideas each hold some part of the truth, and that both ideas, like opposite "poles", must be allowed to "interact in a fruitful, creative tension" (CF. *LET US DREAM*, P. 79). Instead of "choosing a side", on one hand; or, on the other hand, avoiding conflict altogether, the Holy Father encourages us to be "reconcilers". He says:

"The task of the reconciler is... to 'endure' the conflict, facing it head-on, and by discerning see beyond the surface reasons for disagreement, opening those involved to the possibility of a new synthesis, one that does not destroy either pole, but preserves what is good and valid in both in a new perspective" (*IBID.*, P. 80).

Jesus is the ultimate "Reconciler". Some Pharisees accuse him of breaking the sabbath; but in fact, he *fulfills* the sabbath by giving freedom to a child of God. In this way, he preserves the goodness of two things: the law, which pointed to his coming; and grace, which fulfills the law.

Today's Gospel presents us with important questions, as well as questions that are not so helpful.

The important question is: "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" The question is NOT: "Do you believe in the *idea* of Christianity?"

The important question is: "Do you belong to Christ?" The question is NOT: "Do you belong to a certain 'camp' within the Church?"

It is only faith in Jesus, the *person* – and not anybody’s idea *about* Jesus – that allowed the healed man to walk in a new light. The man’s discipleship would not be an endless succession of healings and dramatic experiences. It would involve the struggle and hardship of being aligned with One whose words and signs were opposed by many. Saying “yes” to Jesus would mean living in an environment of conflict, and never choosing evil at the expense of good, but being willing to hold opposing goods in life-giving tension. Amidst the struggle, there would also be the inner joy that comes from the Holy Spirit.

As for the healed man of today’s Gospel, so also for us: discipleship carries both a challenge and a promise. We do not face this challenge by our own power. The One who is the Light of the world will illuminate our hearts with the splendor of his grace, so that we may ponder what is pleasing to God and love Him in all sincerity (CF. PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION).