

23 Μαΐου 2020

Sunday of the Blind Man (Archimandrite Zacharias Zacharou)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



Today's Gospel reading describes the healing of a man born blind, and speaks about the Light of life, the Heavenly Light, Christ. God's revelation occurs in stages as in last week's Gospel. Both the blind man and the Samaritan woman initially consider Christ to be an ordinary man, then they recognise Him as one of the Prophets, and finally they worship Him as the Son of God and Saviour of the world.

The Lord had already faced the fervent hatred of the Jews, who persecuted Him from every side as a blasphemer. There was a great uproar when He broke the Sabbath and referred to Himself as the Son of God; they cast Him out of the synagogue and deprived him of any right to teach. However, the Lord had not yet accomplished 'the work of the One who sent Him'[1]. As He was no longer permitted to teach, he sent them His 'sign', a simple man, a man born blind, who would reprove the blindness of those who thought they were wise and claimed to be the teachers of Israel.

Before the coming of the Holy Spirit, the mind of the disciples was still earthly. When they came across the man who had been deprived of his eyes' light since birth, they implored the Teacher to explain what had caused his disability. Two possibilities passed through their minds: that his blindness was due to his personal sins or the sins of his ancestors. The apostles set out the question on a human level, but the Lord's answer opens up another perspective. Man's reason cannot fathom 'the abyss of His judgements'[2].



In the present life many questions are left unresolved, because the values and convictions of this world are relative. However, God cannot be exhausted by the narrow limits of space and time. His constant concern and care is to restore man to

'the kingdom prepared for him from the foundation of the world'[3]. The suffering and tragedy of this life is a transitory matter, preparing the way for Him to grant His creature 'a rich entrance into His eternal kingdom'[4]. As Saint Sophrony writes: 'the blessing of God in this world manifests as a curse, and a curse as a blessing.' For example, poverty or illness may appear disastrous, but if man resists rancor and humbles himself, turning to God in a spirit of surrender and thanksgiving, it can be transformed, as experience proves, into a greater blessing, the cause of sanctification.

When the Lord permits trials in our life, He gives us the possibility to know His unassailable might, the splendor of His grace, the miracle of salvation. During times of tribulation, men often show resistance and rebel against the One who created us, not knowing the truth, that He is long-suffering and does not despise us, but 'leaves nothing undone' for the salvation of the whole world. Rather than asking the salutary question: 'Lord, how should I comport myself so as not to sin in this trial?', men often arrogantly ask: 'Lord, why am I going through this trial?' or even worse: 'Lord, why did this disaster fall upon me and not someone else?' In this way their mind is darkened and they fall into the devil's condemnation. However, according to the teaching of the apostles, we should rejoice during temptations[5], because the sorrow of the trial is only transient, and when the furnace tests our faith and proves it 'more precious than gold' our joy will last for all eternity[6].

In order to show His great love, Christ was lifted up on the Cross, buried in the earth and descended to the nethermost parts of hell, thus man, too, through suffering, proves his unshakable faith in God. When God permits tribulations to torment His servant, He gives him an opportunity to reveal the beauty of his soul and his love for His Creator. The Lord entered into His eternal glory through His Passion and Cross. Likewise, man enters into the eternal Kingdom by afflictions, becoming a partaker of divine glory and reflecting this glory for all creation, fulfilling thus his destiny. Through our response to God's calling to pass through the 'narrow gate' we become Christ's path, a place that reveals His truth to the world in spite of our poverty and weakness. If we lose heart on the other hand, and do not give the Lord the opportunity to show His power, which is 'made perfect in weakness'[7], we become those who 'crucify to ourselves the Son of God afresh'[8], dishonouring the triumph of the Cross and the Resurrection, which 'through the eternal Spirit', remains for ever[10].

Christ revealed that he had a prescribed amount of time to accomplish the work of salvation entrusted to Him by the Heavenly Father. He said to the disciples, 'As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.' The night of the Cross was

drawing close, 'the hour and the power of darkness'[11], and the Lord knew that He had to accomplish the work of salvation and seal it with His death and Resurrection. However, the Lord is always 'the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world'[12]. Thus the restrictive aspect of time does not limit God, but only man. Each person is given a span of time to work towards holiness and salvation. God evangelises man with the words: 'Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation'[13]. Man must say the 'Amen' during this temporary life. If he is negligent and delays responding to the voice of the Lord, it is not the mighty power of God that will weaken, but the nature of man, which gradually becomes debased, and his being constricted, so that he can no longer contain 'so great a salvation'[14]. There is no more bitter discovery for a Christian, and more especially for monks, who live under the most favourable conditions to keep the commandments, than the tragic realisation that the time to perfect 'holiness in the fear of God'[15] has fled through our hands, and 'without holiness no man shall see the Lord'[16].

In this instance, Christ did not heal the blind man immediately. As the Pharisees prevented Him from teaching, He used a conspicuous way of healing to teach through this simple man. He performed the miracle like a procession, so as to witness eloquently to the truth of the Lord's Divinity. As a noble God, He does not save man against his will or without his albeit meagre co-operation. If man desires of his own accord to submit his little will to the holy will of God, then a great miracle takes place. The Lord spat in the earth, made mud and anointed the blind man's eyes. Priests accompany the anointing of the faithful with prayers such as: 'For the healing of soul and body'. In order to bestow light first upon the eyes of his soul, the Lord could have said, while spreading the mud on the poor beggar's closed eyes: 'I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life[17]'.

The crowd, seeing strange and wondrous events taking place, wondered if the Lord was 'from God' or was a sinner, because he broke the Sabbath. The Pharisees found reason to condemn Him. 'And there was a division among them'[18]. At this point the sharp and two-edged sword is at work that the Lord came to send upon the earth[19]. His fire acts to illumine some and burn others. Christ is both paradise and hell for man. For whoever loves His appearing and has a right relationship with Him, the Lord is Paradise and unspeakable joy. For those who remain outside this saving relationship, the Lord is hell and the fire of His love is unbearable.

When God's grace comes to man, he cannot remain the same. He thinks and behaves differently. When he is touched by the quickening and creative hand of

God, it refashions and renews him, imparting to him His infinite life. Even his external characteristics are changed by grace and inner beauty is reflected in all man's being. The parents of the blind man saw him begging every day at his corner, however, when they were interrogated after his healing, they were not sure if they recognised him. However, the healed man through his contact with the Lord had realised his hypostasis, given to him by the divine commandment that created him, and he was able to say 'I am'.

After this followed further interrogation of the blind man, who had set forth his version of events very clearly. In his simplicity, he aggravated the foolishness and malignancy of the Jews, who came into conflict in their rage. 'We know not from whence he is', they said to the blind man, boasting that they were the disciples of Moses, while a little earlier they had asserted: 'Howbeit we know this man whence he is: but when Christ cometh, no man knoweth whence he is'[20]. If they were true disciples of Moses, they would have recognised that Christ was the One about whom the prophet had spoken[21]. However, those who are blinded by lack of faith, and above all by pride, are confused in their thoughts and words, while the humble man has an enlightened mind that sees clearly and transparently. When man is spiritually blind and no longer receptive to the grace of God, his heart becomes hard as stone and weighs down not just his own existence, but also the whole of creation. Thus, darkness follows petrification and callousness. All the struggle of the man who seeks the Personal God, is to implore God to grant him that 'fire able to melt the hardest metal or stone'[22], to transform the rock that he bears in his chest into soft wax that melts from the warmth of divine love.

When they were called for interrogation, the parents of the former blind man knew that they would face the curse of anathematisation if they declared Christ to be a prophet. Thus, they answered with great prudence, denying all responsibility, that their son was 'of age' to speak for himself. Truly, their son was spiritually 'of age' and proved his courageous disposition, as he didn't hesitate to confess: 'We know that God only hears the prayers of the godly, so this man must be from God'. He spoke with such conviction because by his faith and obedience, his eyes were opened to see the light, firstly the light of this world, and soon after another Light; the true Light, eternal and Heavenly.

Distressed and rendered speechless by the beggar who had been blind, the Pharisees 'cast him out'[23]. However, at the moment he was rejected, he became known by God and a brother of Christ, Who Himself had just been cast out of the synagogue by the work of His hands. Choosing to belong to the Lord, and not the leaders of this world, he received the grace of adoption and the greatest beatitude

was proven in him: 'Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake'[24]. Those who are rejected in this world become the most beloved citizens of Heaven. Jesus Himself came to find him, and the man who was formerly blind, having assimilated himself to His path, made no delay to confess his faith in the true Lord and Son of God and worship Him 'in spirit and truth'[25].

As He oftentimes repeated, Christ came for those 'who have need of a physician and of healing'[26]. The Almighty Jesus who 'commanded the light to shine out of darkness'[27], shines 'to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God'[28] in the hearts of whosoever cries out to Him that they long to regain their sight, heedless to the mockery and derision of the princes of this world. Man has not been made to behold the sensory world, however beautiful it might be, but rather to behold the wonders of God in the Light of His Countenance. Spiritual vision is given according to the measure of man's faith. It becomes clearer the more steadfastly he keeps the Lord's commandments and the more faithfully he follows Him, united with Him by an indissoluble bond of holy love.

When man acknowledges his spiritual poverty and the blindness of the eyes of his soul, he laments and his weeping gradually cleanses the mirror of his heart, stained by pride and the passions, so it may reflect the brightness of the Lord's glory to all creation and return everything back to God with thanksgiving.

[1] Cf. John 4:34 and 17:4.

[2] See Matins, Holy Wednesday, Apostica, Troparion of Cassiani.

[3] See Matt. 25:34.

[4] See 2 Pet. 1:11.

[5] Cf. James 1:2.

[6] Cf. 1 Pet. 1:6-7.

[7] 2 Cor. 12:9.

[8] See Heb. 6:6.

[9] See Heb. 9:14.

[10] See Heb. 10:12.

[11] Luke 22:53.

[12] See John 1:9.

[13] 1 Cor. 6:2.

[14] See Heb. 2:3.

[15] 2 Cor. 7:1.

[16] See Heb. 12:14.

[17] John 8:12.

[18] John 9:16.

[19] Cf. Matt. 10:34.

[20] John 7:27.

[21] Cf. John 5:46.

[22] We Shall See Him as He Is, p. 50.

[23] John 9:34.

[24] Matt. 5:11.

[25] John 4:24.

[26] Cf. Matt. 9:12.

[27] 2 Cor. 4:6.

[28] See 2 Cor. 4:6.