

Rev. Derek Fairman

4th Sunday of Lent A

This Sunday, we hear in the Gospel about the man born blind. The Lord Jesus cured the man of his blindness. Then, the man had to face the public, and then the authorities. The authorities did not believe the man, that he had been born blind, and the man found himself in the midst of a series of questions about the Lord Jesus. Yet the man born blind defended the Lord Jesus and eventually came to a greater faith in Him.

It is important to note that the man defended the Lord Jesus without the Lord Jesus there to make him do so. The man went from not knowing who the Lord Jesus was at the beginning of the passage, to recognizing the Lord and worshipping Him towards the end of the passage. The man came to this faith on his own.

Why is that important? Well, sometimes it is important to realize that the Lord never restricts our freedom, even though He wants us to come to Him for salvation. That is not always true of others. Sometimes others would mock our beliefs or would be very critical of every idea, except of course their own ideas. Eventually that leads to a situation in which people are dependent upon them for ideas or beliefs: people only repeat what someone else says or thinks, and cannot put those ideas in their own words.

Perhaps you are familiar with the Greek myth of Narcissus. He was the boy who was in love with himself, and one day, while traveling through the woods, came upon his reflection in a pool of water and could not be drawn away. Eventually he wasted away from his inability to stop staring at his own reflection. That myth is one that teaches against excessive self-love.

However, there is a corollary myth that goes with that, the myth of Echo. Echo was a nymph who pined for the love of Narcissus. She would always repeat what others had last said. What happened to her? Narcissus would not love her, because he only loved himself. She eventually faded away, until only her voice remained.

While the myth of Narcissus involved excessive self-love, the myth of Echo can teach us about the opposite: Echo had no personality, so to speak. She only repeated what others had said, but never came up with anything original. There was no self apart from others. Her fading away could be a metaphor for how someone's personality can disappear, especially in the presence of someone else who is domineering.

The Lord Jesus is never someone who dominates us. At first, when he was asked, the man born blind did not know who the Lord Jesus was, or where the Lord Jesus was. The Lord Jesus only caught up with the man born blind after the man was questioned, which tells us that the man defended the Lord Jesus on his own. The Lord was not standing next to the man, telling him what to say. The man came to have faith in the Lord Jesus because he defended the Lord against the authorities.

In our lives, there are those truths that we learned as children. Maybe we didn't really understand them until much later. Perhaps we learned about sin as a child, but then later in life we really came to grips with how much sin affects our lives. We learned that evil is real and that we need to confront evil. In those cases, what we learned about abstractly when we were younger became real and we grew in our understanding of what we had once learned.

It is a way in which we come to terms with life on our own. There are ways in which life itself is our greatest teacher. The man born blind learned about the Lord Jesus through his experience. We too have to learn through experience, through an encounter with the Lord Jesus. Granted, we learn about the Lord Jesus in our religious education. However, only through an encounter with the Lord Jesus do we really get to understand Him and get to know Him.

One way in which we get to know the Lord Jesus is in the Sacrament of Confession. There we come to meet the Lord Jesus, who meets us with kindness and mercy. He does not wish us to fear His presence, but to recognize that He can bring us healing. Just as He healed the man born blind, the Lord Jesus can heal the conscience and the soul of each one of us. Then, we do not just learn that the Lord is merciful, we actually experience that mercy. We experience the healing that we need and enjoy the freedom that comes from being released from our sins.

In the sacraments, the Lord comes to us and draws us closer to Him. He does not make us love Him, but He does give us many good things. We experience His own divine life in the graces that we receive from the sacraments. We receive the strength that we need in order to deal with life's challenges.

As we approach the altar, we keep in mind that for the blind man, the Lord Jesus was not someone that He learned about; the Lord Jesus was someone that He met and found Himself defending. The man felt drawn to the Lord Jesus. During his Lenten season, we pray that by our reception of the Sacraments and by our prayers, we will meet the Lord Jesus and He will bring us all good things, and we too will be drawn to His presence.