

“He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.”

John 9:15

Interrogation of the Man Healed on the Sabbath

JOHN 9:13–23 ¹³*They 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.”*

¹⁸*The 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.”*

When the man healed of his blindness is brought to the religious leaders, the spotlight turns to Jesus and an investigation begins. Asked to recount how he had received his sight, the man stated the facts: “He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.” The Pharisees were clearly divided about Jesus. Some were saying, “This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath.” Surely he could have waited until the next day to heal the man. Jesus had kneaded the clay with his saliva to make mud, and kneading was among the types of work forbidden on the Sabbath. Others among the Pharisees were saying, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” Surely one opposed to God could not do such a good and wonderful deed.

When the man himself is asked his assessment of the man who healed him, the man arrived at a verdict similar to that of the Samaritan woman: “He is a prophet” (verse 17; 4:19). In a further effort to review the facts of the case to find some inconsistency, the Pharisees send for his parents. They confirm that he was born blind, but they deny knowing how it is that he now sees (verse 21). Despite their plea of ignorance, the parents seem to know more than they choose to divulge. They do not want to be dragged into the debate because of their fear of the religious authorities, for the Pharisees had already declared that anyone confessing Jesus as the Messiah would be expelled from the synagogue (verse 22). Eviction from the synagogue, the center of Jewish religious and social life, meant severe social exclusion.

Why does Jesus seem to perform so many of his miracles on the Sabbath? Surely he could have easily chosen some other day and avoided a lot of controversy from his detractors. The gospel has just recounted this wondrous healing of the man who was blind from birth, but then the writer adds, “now it was the Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes” (verse 14). We know immediately that the wonder and gratitude that fill the scene will be sidetracked and extinguished by this seemingly absurd discussion of healing on the Sabbath.

But don’t we do the same thing? In our parishes we overlook the powerful grace of the sacraments we share, and focus on the divisive issues that seem so trivial in comparison. In our families we take for granted the joy of sharing life with those we love, and we get hung up on the petty issues that lead to arguments. We do it with ourselves too, by ignoring our gifts and talents, while we obsess over our minor faults.

The gospel writer wants us to take note of the ridiculousness of this discussion because he wanted the church of his day to transcend this kind of divisiveness. The fact that we haven't changed much in two thousand years is probably all too obvious. But the gospel presents us with a higher calling: the inspiration and grace to overcome our sinful and petty nature, and the glorious task of transforming our lives in Christ. The word of Jesus calls us to transcend our fears and small-mindedness and live in the freedom of the truth.

Reflection and Discussion

- If Jesus honored the Sabbath as a faithful Jew, why would he choose to heal on the Sabbath?

- In what ways do I ignore the big picture of God's grace and obsess about minute trivialities? What does this narrative challenge me to change about myself, my family, or my church?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you want to give me a vision of how wide and wonderful life can be, yet I insist on wearing blinders. Open my eyes to the wonders you offer me so that I will know the truth that can set me free.