

**HE WENT AND WASHED AND CAME BACK SEEING – Biblical Commentary by F. Alberto Maggi
OSM**

Jn 9.1-41

As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

Having said these things, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing. The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar were saying, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" Some said, "It is he." Others said, "No, but he is like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." So they said to him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed and received my sight." They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ So the Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, "He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see." Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a division among them. So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet." 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 and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?"

His parents answered, "We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. ²¹ But how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." (His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put

out of the synagogue.) Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." So for the second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, "Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner." He answered, "Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" He 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?" And they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from."

The man answered, "Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." They answered him, "You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?" And they cast him out. Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?" ³⁷ Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you." He said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him. Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind." Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, "Are we also blind?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains.

The religious authority that claim to be the light of the people, the guide of the blind – as they liked to be called – in reality they are themselves blinded by their own doctrine that prevents them from seeing the works of God the creator. As put in the John's Gospel chapter 9.

In the episode Jesus gives back the sight of a born blind man, sending him at the pool of Siloam. And the evangelist states what it means 'the envoy', that is Jesus Himself. Therefore Jesus, defines Himself as 'light of the world', invites this individual, that has never knew what light was, to go and meet it. "So he went and washed and came back seeing."

And here the trouble begins. Miraculously cured, the individual immediately finds himself accused. Above all there is the wonder of the people near him, who had seen him before, as a beggar, now they do not know him. It is strange. How did they not know him? The light had only returned to his eyes, he

had not changed physically. When one meets Jesus, remains as before, but also is a completely new person, because His message gives dignity and freedom to the people.

This is the motive for which they did not recognize the man born blind. And in front of debate on 'is it him or not', the ex-blind man says "*I am....*" It is the same way with which Jesus claims the divine condition. When one meets Jesus, the divine condition of Jesus has begun to all that welcome Him. As John said in his prologue "*But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.*"

So now the troubles for this ex-blind man begin. For the first time, and a good seven times – it is this the theme running through the passage - they will ask him how his eyes were opened. To understand this question that will appear thought out all the episode for a good seven times, it must be remembered that 'to open the eyes' was an image of a liberation from oppression, and it was the task of the Messiah.

Unable to have their own opinion, that was not that issued by the authority and the spiritual chiefs, they took this ex blind man to the Pharisees, the people's spiritual leaders. Why? Because it was Saturday. For the second time Jesus healed someone on the day on which it was forbidden not only to cure the sick, but also to visit them. Saturday – we know – was the most important commandment, that which God observed.

Therefore they were unable to judge this event because there is undoubtedly a positive aspect, but there is the offence of the most important commandment. So even the Pharisees ask how could this man have received his sight. There was no joy, no congratulations towards the fact that this man, blind from birth, had received his sight. They want only to know how.

And, accustomed always to judge all and all with the law in hand, that is their way of judging, "*Some of the Pharisees said, "This man..", that is Jesus, "... is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.*" The only way to judge for a Pharisee is the observance of the laws, not the good of mankind. For Jesus, instead, the way to judge is for the good of mankind. Who judges on the base of the law, of the doctrine, a code, it is clear and sustains that Jesus does not come from God. Others asked how could a sinner work these signs.

"*So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him,.."* Unable to give a reply, they want that the ex blind man gives it. "*...since he has opened your eyes?*", it is this that preoccupies them. It preoccupies that the man had opened the eyes because the religious institution can dominate the people until the population is blind, but when they open their eyes and see the face of God and the dignity to which he calls them, the first to pay are those that assume to be representatives of this God and in reality are only the darkness that obstruct this light from the world.

Well then He replies "*«He comes from God »*". While the Pharisees were sure saying "This man does not come from God", the blind man- he that was blind sees while those that see are blind – says: "*He is a prophet.*" Meaning he comes from God. Now the Jews enters into the field. With this term the

evangelist indicate the peoples' religious leaders; well then, to defend their doctrine, they deny the evidence. *"The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight,"*.

"To defend their theology, their doctrine and the laws, deny evidence, deny life. And they threaten the parents of the ex blind man and they question them. It is a very heavy interrogation, making them out to be swindlers and asking two questions: *"«Is this your son, »"* therefore insinuating that there is doubt that he is not their son, *"«...who you say was born blind? »"* Therefore two questions. "Is this your son?" and "Was he born blind? How is it he sees now?" The parents reply that it is their son, he was born blind, and they do not know how his eyes were opened and they say, *"He is of age; ask him."* It means he is of age, more than thirteen years old.

And the evangelist notes that they say this for fear of the religious authority because they had already decided that, anyone who had recognized Jesus as the Messiah, the Christ, would have been cast out of the synagogue, that is a civil death. Those cast out of the synagogue, were considered like the plague, one must keep a distance from them of at least two meters for security.

Not happy, *"..they called the man who had been blind and said to him, «Give glory to God »"*, the expression means, 'confess, recognize your mistake, be sincere, even if you must pay the consequence *"«We know that this man is a sinner. »"* Therefore the judgment of the authority must be more valid than the experience of the individual. For the authority the people cannot have their own opinions that have not been sent by them.

Well the reply of the ex blind man is rich with humor. He says: "I do not enter into theological questions I am not capable"..... *"«Whether he is a sinner I do not know... »"*, therefore he does not enter into doctrinal questions, he speaks of his own experience, *"«One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see. »"* you will say that this man is a sinner, you maybe want to insinuate that for me it would have been better to remain blind other than recover my sight as a sinner, but my experience is positive: first I was blind and now I see.

The evangelist is saying that it is not the doctrine, but the experience of the individual is that that has the better. One's own conscience is first before the doctrine. The doctrine can say what it likes, that your experience is negative, that you are sinning, but if your life says that this is positive, if this communicates life to you, this is what counts.

Therefore the ex blind man ridicules the comportment of this authority. Saying "I do not know if he is a sinner, but I know I was blind and now I see." And here again another insistence of the question: *"«How did he open your eyes? »"* These want to know, how his eyes were opened. And, with a humorous ending *"«I have told you already, and you would not listen ..Do you also want to become his disciples? »"*

Better not to have said anything, *"..they reviled him,"* When the authority do not know what to reply, they begin to insult. *"And saying, «You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses!»"* They do not follow a living person, but worship a dead person. *"«We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for*

this man...» ,it is interesting that in the Gospels the religious authority, the Jews, the leaders, when they turn to Jesus, or speak of Him, they always avoid giving Him a name, and use disparaging terms “this man”.

“*«..this man, we do not know where he comes from».*” They do not know Jesus because they do not know God, they do not know the Father, lover of life. The defenders of the lawmaker God are unable to understand the Creator’s behavior that is not shown in the doctrine, but in life. “*The man answered, «Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes »*”.

For the sixth time we note the insistence with this opened the eyes that is the theme of this passage, and the ex blind man, that is a beggar, with common sense, ridicule the acrobatic theology of the leaders. Everyone recognizes that there is a divine intervention, apart from the authority. And with common sense replies, “*«Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing. »*” It is an elementary thing. It is a thing so clear.....

How come the authority do not understand this? The doctrine has blinded them. For them, that which interests them is the good of the doctrine, therefore in the defense of their institution, and not for the good of the mankind. The good of mankind does not interest them. They have no desire to learn, but only teach, they answer with violence “*«You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us? »*” At the beginning of the passage there was the disciple’s question if this boy had sinned or his parents because of the fact that he was blind.

Blindness was considered a curse because it prevented the studying of the law. Well, the Jews, the leaders. Have no doubts. He was born in sin; the man must return blind to give reason to them. “*And they cast him out.*” They cast him out of the synagogue, but it is not such a great harm: cast out of the religion, found faith. In fact, cast out of the synagogue, Jesus searches for him and finds him. The religious leaders that excommunicate, are in fact the ones really excommunicated.