

6-2-19 Jesus Heals the Blind Man

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Christ is Risen!

Indeed, He is risen!

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

We have, I'm sure at least most of us, speaking very specifically about myself, have read something, then at the end of the page, realized my mind has been somewhere else and I had no idea what I just read. It's not just when we're reading a book that the words seem somehow not to register as they should.

A good example of this that some of us can identify with is those times where we're driving down the highway and we see a speed limit sign that says 65 mph. We see the sign. We know that it says 65, but somehow it has little effect on how fast we decide to drive. I'm sure that Steve or James Bernard can identify to the truth of what I'm saying, but as soon as they pull us over and write us a ticket, a speeding ticket, all of a sudden we begin to internalize the meaning of 65 mph. It begins to mean something very specific to us. We slow down, we glance at our speedometer more often. You might even set your cruise control at 64 just to be safe.

It often takes unique events in life to awaken us, to motivate us, to move us, to actually take more seriously the things that we encounter in life.

On a more serious level, I had an experience this past week while I was doing vigil for our beloved brother, Nektarios Burkett. I was reading from the Psalms and from Job. The scriptures I was reading began to take on a deeper meaning for me personally as I stood there before the reposed body of our brother Nektarios. Our life and earth is limited. We don't live forever in this state. We will all die at some point and we will lie there in a coffin with this family, our church, reading vigil over our reposed bodies. I thought of a line from Father Sophrony's morning prayer that I've shared before. It says when it would please thee, oh Lord, to bring my life to an end, forewarn me that I may prepare my soul to come before thee.

And so it was with Nektarios. He knew he was nearing the end of his earthly life. He had time to prepare his soul to come before the Lord, and that's exactly what he did. He was obedient to the high calling of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Today's Gospel tells a story of a man born blind and how the Lord heals him. Oftentimes we get so accustomed to hearing a story in the Holy Gospel that we somehow miss the details. Kind of like the speed limit sign. This is one such story we must first contemplate what it must've been like at that time in history to be born blind. It's not likely that he had a well-trained seeing-eye dog to help him get around or handicapped parking for the donkey. It's a different time.

Imagine this poor blind man sitting as a beggar with people passing by day after day, year after year. His parents are in the area, but one assumes that they are not particularly well off. If they were, it would be reasonable to assume that he would not have to beg, that they would be able to take care of his basic needs.

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But then we come to the most bizarre part of the story. The part that we read but somehow don't internalize. It's the interaction between the Lord and the blind man. Now in this story the blind man is not calling out to the Lord as we've seen in other stories. You remember the story of the two blind men, several actions, several different stories of different blind men. When they hear that the Lord is coming their way they call out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us." And when they're told to be quiet, they call out all the more, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!"

But this man and this incident does not ask the Lord to come and heal him. He's sitting there minding his own business. The Lord and his disciples notice this man, the disciples asked the Lord a question about him. They say, "Rabbi, whose sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" The Lord responds, "It is neither his sin or his parents' that was the cause of his blindness." Then the Lord does the strangest of things. He spits in the dirt, makes a little mud, and puts it in the man's face.

What could be more insulting than this? Think about it. You're born blind. You're sitting on the roadside with your beggar's cup. Then a stranger comes along and spits on the ground, makes a little mud and puts it in your face. Then this same stranger has the audacity to tell you to go wash. Isn't that bizarre? You might just think that man would be highly irritated that someone put mud in his face and then tells him to go wash.

Well, what does the man do? Does he get angry? No. Does he try to fight the Lord off? No. No. What does he do?

This is the important points. This is the important point. He obeys. He obeys. He does exactly what the Lord has commanded him to do. This kind of obedience, under these circumstances, seems to me to take great humility. He goes and washes his face in the Pool of Siloam, which is in itself a significant event. He has to go from where he is, past the people with mud in his face to the pool of Siloam. Has to find his way, a blind man, and then wash.

The result of his obedience, his humble obedience, is that he receives his sight for the first time in his life. He was born blind and now he can see. Everyone begins to question him, "Are you not the beggar born blind? How is it that you now see?"

He tells them, "It was a man, Jesus, that put mud on his face and told him to wash in the Pool of Siloam and now I can see." People take him to the Pharisees who again questioned him. They don't believe him, so they call and send for his parents and question them. His parents agree, "Yes, we know this is our son. We know that he was born blind. But how he now sees we do not know." So they questioned the man again, and again he tells them.

It just so happens that it was the Sabbath when the Lord performs this miracle. Therefore, some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God because he does not keep the Sabbath." You see the absolute insanity of that. How little sense that makes. A man who was born blind, a man who has spent his whole life without sight, a man who was reduced to the status of a beggar is now made whole by this miraculous event. Instead of praising God for this miracle, the Pharisees are complaining that Jesus broke the Sabbath. He did that many times, by the way.

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They should have been praising God for his benevolence. Instead, they're denying Christ's divinity. The man had been physically blind all of his life. But much worse, much worse than the physical blindness of this man is the spiritual blindness of the Pharisees. They had eyes, but they could not see. The Lord revealed his divinity as union with the Father, his power, and the only thing the Pharisees saw was that he healed a man on the Sabbath.

In contemplating the scriptures, we should all ask ourselves the question, who do I resemble, the blind man or the Pharisee? Who do I resemble? Really, we aren't blind like the man born blind, but in as much as we desire the things of this world more than we desire God, we are spiritually blind. As much as we are prideful and lack obedience, we are spiritually blind. In as much as we are self-willed and judgmental of others, we are spiritually blind.

Our passions, our desire for carnal things, for wealth and comfort, our self-love, whatever it is. If it takes a place of priority in our heart over God, we are spiritually blind. And those passions will prevent us from making progress in the struggle to know God.

When the Lord says, "Go and wash," we must be obedient. "Go and wash your ego. Go and wash your pride. Go and wash your love of money. Go and wash your envy of neighbor. Go and wash your judgmental attitude. Go and wash all the passions which prevent you from knowing me. Go and wash."

Brothers and sisters, let us embrace the simple obedience to Christ that we see in the actions of the man born blind and in our obedience, in our obedience, our humble obedience to Christ, may our spiritual eyes be made well. Amen.

Christ is Risen!

Indeed, He is Risen!