

## LENT 4, Mar. 19, 2023, Year A

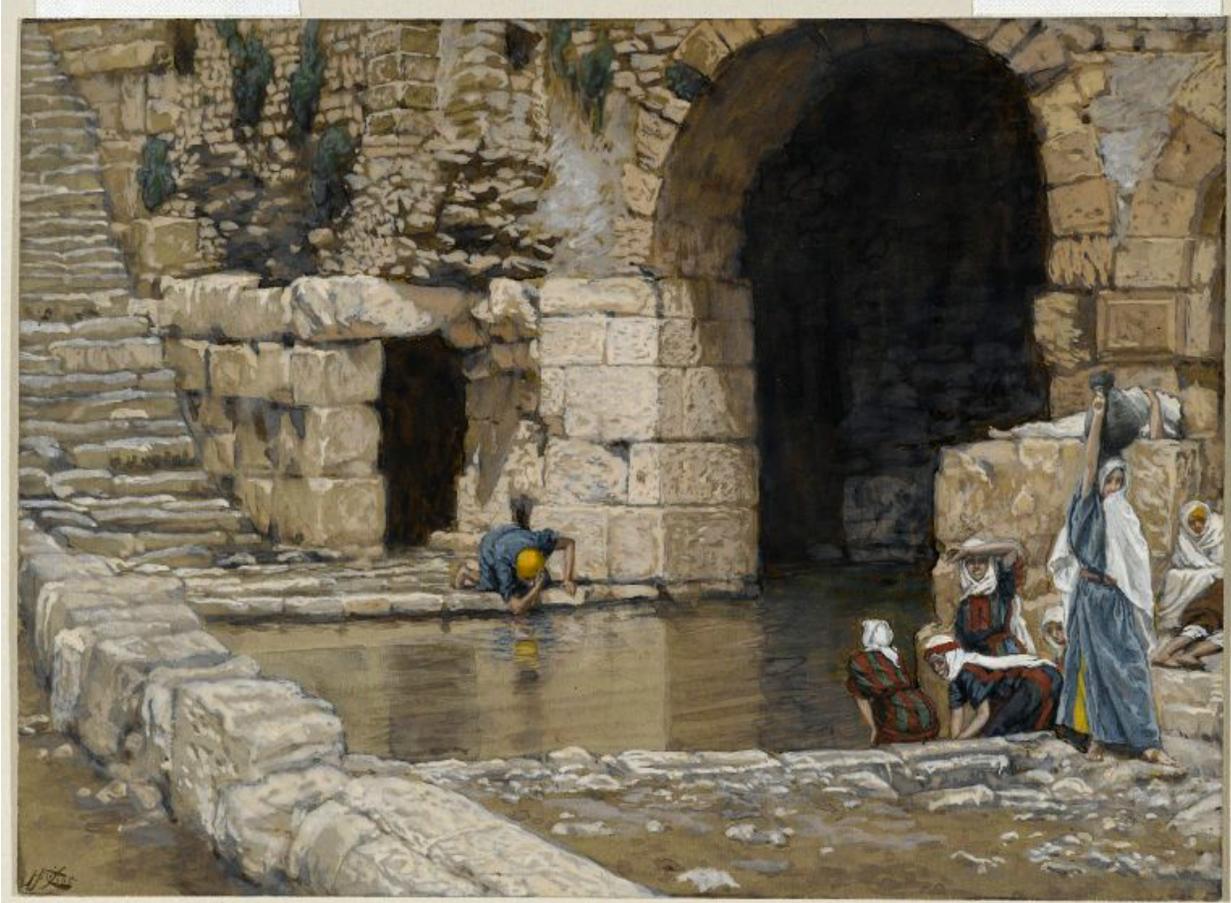
- We tend to take sight for granted. We look around us in order to see people and other parts of the world. One reason to **see** other people and places is so that we may *know* them. But **knowing** them has this further potential: *knowing* can lead to *loving*. Therefore, **we see so that we may have the opportunity to know. And then, the opportunity also to love what we see.** Jesus as the Light of the world enables this potential, for he enables *true seeing*. As the Light of the world, he enables *loving*.
- The goal of *seeing, knowing* and *loving* is not simply so that we can perceive and embrace individual things. For the individual things we look at, are *parts of a greater whole*. The goal of our perception is to **see**, to **know**, and then to **love** the **whole**. It is to see, know and love what is holy - as God perceives and embraces the whole world.
- To *observe all* this is to begin to sketch a *holistic* vision of our lives in this world. A **holistic vision** is a **holy vision**. It is a vision of life, and of Creation, which Jesus embodies for us, and one he encourages us to receive. Our Gospel today presents a story about what it's like to *have less than* a holistic or holy vision. The result is that we diminish our concept of ourselves and others, and our understanding of what our lives are really *for*. Being clear about the significance of holistic and holy vision helps us gain clarity about the Pharisees, and their role in the story.
- One insight I have gained, from my continuing study of Scripture, concerns *how we understand the Pharisees*. Most of us view them *negatively*. It's easy to do that, for it seems an obvious point in the New Testament. To put it simply, the *good* Jesus appears, bringing with him the power of the Kingdom of God. The *bad* Pharisees oppose him, often for narrow and self-protecting reasons. Yet, to accept this *simplistic* and *polarized* distinction between Jesus and the Pharisees, *without further reflection*, obscures something important. It obscures how much Jesus had in common with the Pharisees. What they had in common lies behind *Nicodemus' tentative movement toward Jesus*, the night that he came to him after dark.

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- Nicodemus' commonality with Jesus is also evident in Jesus' unhesitating commendation of every letter of the Law, every dotting of an "i," and every crossing of a "t," as Matthew tells us. *Both* Jesus and the Pharisees *upheld the holiness and righteousness of the Law* because they *shared* the belief that the Law embodied God's own holiness and righteousness. So, though Jesus challenges his followers to have a righteousness that *exceeds* the Pharisees, *he does not criticize* the Pharisees' quest to receive it. **Jesus criticizes *how little* some of the Pharisees see, but not what they are looking at.**
- *Just like us*, the Pharisees want to see *rightly*, and *believe they do*. This is because they *know* the Law. They were famous for enumerating and memorizing all the commands in the Torah. Paradoxically, as they are portrayed in the New Testament, their focus in upholding all these 613 commands is on the parts rather than on the whole. They affirm the whole of the Law, but they come at this through *a focused regard for individual rules*. By contrast, while Jesus also affirms *the whole*, he does so by focusing on the unity of the Torah, which in turn gives meaning to *the parts*. Remember how he taught us to love God with our whole being, and our neighbor as ourself... and how *the whole* of the Law and the Prophets are unified or summarized by this?
- In other words, in *seeing*, and in *seeing for the purpose of knowing*, the Pharisees had *limited* vision. **Yes, they did have a vision of the holy.** But they saw things rightly *only in part*. They *looked for* the holy, but did not *fully see* it. *For they did not have a holistic vision*, and fell short of what Jesus commends as **holy vision**. The distinction may seem subtle - in fact, so subtle, that it may not appear worth making. But sometimes, and especially when it comes to our relationships with others, *small differences* can lead to *bigger* conflict than do great differences. And paradoxically, great differences between people can sometimes lead to mutual appreciation! {The Civil War: a conflict among folks who had so much in common rather than between folks who shared so little!}

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- Of course, the point of these insights is not so we can have more historical knowledge of Jesus and his times. **The point is to enhance our *seeing*, so we can really perceive *what God wants us to see*.** What we are dealing with here is something about the *spiritual* dimension of sight. Physical vision, and the act of seeing things, depends on light. Physical *light* enables physical *sight*. And so, we may rightly suppose that the reason why Jesus was and is called *the Light of the world*, is because his *light* is key to spiritual *sight*. His light illumines the world and all that is in it, so that we may see and know it all, *in relation to him*. It is so that we can come to see what someone once called 'God's letters to us throughout Creation.' Seeing everything as graced by him, as infused with his light, transforms our knowledge of everything, including ourselves.
- But the whole point of *seeing rightly* is not simply so that we can *know* rightly. Strangely, we tend to want to see because *we fear what we cannot see*, and can only imagine. Yet, *seeing* rightly and *knowing* everything rightly, *in Christ*, are both **so that we may *love* rightly**. And *loving rightly* has to do with loving the whole Creation for the sake of its parts, as well as loving its parts for the sake of our Lord God, the Creator. When we love the world and all that is in it for the Lord's sake, we are ready to follow him, and begin to live the Faith.
- The most important *coming-to-see* that occurs in our Gospel this morning is **not** that a man *born blind* attains *physical* vision. **It is that he comes to see what is *holy***. He comes to see **how encounter with Jesus is the key to *holy vision***. We pay attention to how we see so we can be more discerning about what we see. We yearn to see and know the Lord in his glory, present throughout the world. This is so we can love the Lord of glory, wherever we are, even here - in this moment, and in this place.



James Tissot, Blind Man Washing in the Pool of Siloam

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### John 9:1-41 [NRSV]

As Jesus walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed 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." When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then 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. Then 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." Some 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. So 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."

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; but 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." His 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. Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. 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?" Then 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, "Here is an astonishing 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 he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from

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God, he could do nothing." They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains."