

Fourth Sunday of Lent – Year A (2020)

Two things often jump out at me when I read stories from Sacred Scripture.

On the one hand, I am often amazed at the similarities between people who live long ago and those of us living today. Thousands of years have passed, but in many ways, people really haven't changed all that much.

We seem to have many of the same problems and concerns. We are still trying our best to make a living, feed our families, and keep a roof over our heads. We still worry about bad weather, violent crime, and high taxes. We still love and hate, and fight and make up. And yes, we still sin.

But the other thing that jumps out at me is the other side of the coin—the way in which people long ago do not think like we do today. Yes, we might be quite similar, but we are also very different.

One of those differences is on full display in the story of ***The Man Born Blind***. This story is plentiful harvest and there is much to glean from it.

It begins with a shocking point of view, a disturbing kind of belief:
“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

A question Jesus quickly answers: ***“Neither he nor his parents sinned; ...”***

This deep-seated idea that God might inflict blindness, or cancer, or diabetes (or any other affliction) on someone because of his or her sin, or worse yet, because of someone else’s sin—is an opinion that many today both mock and ridicule.

And while we don’t fully understand why some people have certain hardships and others do not; why some people wrestle with all sorts of illnesses, while others are pillars of health—the one thing we do not believe is that any of these things are punishment for sin, and absolutely NOT a punishment because of the sin of another person.

Yet, this is precisely what people believed while Jesus walked this earth, and truthfully, what some cultures and individuals believe to this day.

The God we believe in is not like that at all. We believe in a God who is not resentful, reckless, or ruthless, but loving—so much so that he became one of us and died for our salvation.

And so, when we see this mindset on full display in stories such as the one we have today, we immediately think to ourselves, “this doesn’t make any sense.” “That’s not how my God works.” Someone’s sin could never make another person blind.

Or could it?

Those of us of a certain age (and maybe some young people who enjoy musical theater) will remember the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical *South Pacific*. It’s about U.S. troops stationed on an island during World War II.

As with all musicals, there is one song that best expresses the heart of the story, and in *South Pacific*, it’s called: **“You’ve Got to Be Carefully Taught.”**

In this song, a soldier struggling with romantic feelings for a native girl, sings about prejudice, and how we often grow up to have the same attitudes as the people most important to us.

It’s both touching and painful as the song attempts to reveal some deep truth about why we often think the way we think.

So, here’s the question, Could one person’s sin make another person blind? Absolutely! You bet.

But God is not responsible. We are.

We take our harmful attitudes, our sinful thoughts, our hatred and bitterness and cynicism and greed and dishonesty, and we pass it on to others. Maybe without even being aware that we are doing it.

And so, as we continue our ***once-in-a-lifetime*** journey through Lent let us be sure to take a good look at our own “blindness”— a “blindness” that doesn’t just harm ourselves.

Remember the Persian Proverb, “**A blind person who sees is always better than a seeing person who is blind.**”