



The Armor of Faith
Topic Summary: Miracles and Faith
The Man Born Blind



I am the Light of the World
Public Domain

Introduction

[Greeting:] → Welcome to “The Armor of Faith,” a show where we hope to bring our listeners closer to the Word of God and the blessings we receive through living in the fullness of the Catholic faith. My name is Doug and I will be your host as we discuss the blessings of the Church Christ built upon Peter.

I am joined today by my panel: [names]

Helen is a Dominican and is engaged in youth catechesis and music ministry. Sharon is our token cradle Catholic, and I am simply here to ask questions, because, as our audience knows, I have lots of questions. So welcome to our panelists as well as to our listeners.

Let us open with a prayer:

Heavenly Father, we lift up our hearts in thanks and praise for this opportunity to open and share your Holy Word this day. We pray that You are with us and all our listeners as we share with one another the blessings of faith. We pray You will grant us wisdom and understanding as we seek to learn Your Holy Truth.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit we pray.

Discussion:

During our last discussion, we opened the door to some of the miracles of the New Testament. Some of the stories are very familiar to us for a variety of reasons, but we should take a moment, from time to time, to examine the full context of a given miracle. We might take a moment and reflect upon the environment of the event to include the culture and the surrounding history. We might take a moment and close our eyes to see how we might imagine the miracle if we were there. We should ask ourselves about the skepticism we might have or how we know the miracle was truly a divine intervention.

Of course, as we accept God and His Holy Word, we accept the events which His Word describes, but what about events in our day? What about our experience? How do we share with others experiences which we cannot explain?

As we continue our discussion concerning miracles and faith, we will talk about the impact of such events, not only for the people of the past, but those of our present, as well as our future. We can see that such events stir conversation, but do they also stir belief? We might ask, what do we confront when we experience the divine intervention of God?

Today, we are going to visit the story of the man born blind as it is recounted in John 9 and the miracle which Jesus performed by giving sight to a man who had only known darkness from birth.

(John 9)

1 As he passed by he saw a man blind from birth. 2 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" 3 Jesus answered, "Neither he nor his parents sinned; it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him. 4 We have to do the works of the one who sent me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work. 5 While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." 6 When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva, and smeared the clay on his eyes, 7 and said to him, "Go wash in the Pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed, and came back able to see.

8 His neighbors and those who had seen him earlier as a beggar said, "Isn't this the one who used to sit and beg?" 9 Some said, "It is," but others said, "No, he just looks like him." He said, "I am." 10 So they said to him, "[So] how were your eyes opened?" 11 He replied, "The man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and told me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' So I went there and washed and was able to see." 12 And they said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I don't know."

13 They brought the one who was once blind to the Pharisees. 14 Now Jesus had made clay and opened his eyes on a sabbath. 15 So then the Pharisees also asked him how he was able to see. He said to them, "He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and now I can see." 16 So some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, because he does not keep the sabbath." [But] others said, "How can a sinful man do such signs?" And there was a division among them. 17 So they said to the blind man again, "What do you have to say about him, since he opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet."

18 Now the Jews did not believe that he had been blind and gained his sight until they summoned the parents of the one who had gained his sight. 19 They asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How does he now see?" 20 His parents answered and said, "We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. 21 We do not know how he sees now, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him, he is of age; he can speak for himself." 22 His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone acknowledged him as the Messiah, he would be expelled from the synagogue. 23 For this reason his parents said, "He is of age; question him."

24 So a second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, "Give God the praise! We know that this man is a sinner." 25 He replied, "If he is a sinner, I do not know. One thing I do know is that I was blind and now I see." 26 So they said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" 27 He answered them, "I told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?" 28 They ridiculed him and said, "You are that man's disciple; we are disciples of Moses!" 29 We know that God spoke to Moses, but we do not know where this one is from." 30 The man answered and said to them, "This is what is so amazing, that you do not know where he is from, yet he opened my eyes. 31 We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if one is devout and does his will, he listens to him. 32 It is unheard of that anyone ever opened the eyes of a person born blind. 33 If this man were not from God, he would not be able to do anything." 34 They answered and said to him, "You were born totally in sin, and are you trying to teach us?" Then they threw him out.

35 When Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, he found him and said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" 36 He answered and said, "Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?" 37 Jesus said to him, "You have seen him and the one speaking with you is he." 38 He said, "I do believe, Lord," and he worshiped him. 39 Then Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see might see, and those who do see might become blind."

40 Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not also blind, are we?" 41 Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you are saying, 'We see,' so your sin remains."

For our listeners, don't do this if you are driving, walking, or doing anything that would make closing your eyes dangerous, but if you are listening from someplace safe, I would like you to close your eyes for a moment to experience the perspective of the man born blind. Of course, I am depriving you of your sight only for a few moments, but think of what the experience would be of someone who has never seen light, color, or shape. Think of what it meant in the times of Jesus such that those with such afflictions had few choices of how to make a living and were often at the mercy of those who passed them by in the streets.

We might imagine a sunny day and the warmth of the sun on our cheeks. Though blind, we could still experience our surroundings through what we could hear, feel, and smell. Perhaps there were sounds of birds or children playing, we do not know from the story, we can only imagine. But then, we hear passers by and a question asked, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

It was an academic question. It was the ponderings, not about how to help someone in need, rather, it was about who might be responsible for this affliction, because the people of the day believed that afflictions were a punishment for sin and that the sins of the fathers would be visited upon the children, so, who caused this?

Now, think of yourselves hearing this question. How might you respond. "Excuse me, I'm blind, but I can still hear you know. You know I can hear you, don't you? I may be a beggar, sir, but that is no reason to talk as if I am not here." Of course, the story doesn't tell us about such

thoughts the blind man might have. Instead, we hear the response of Jesus, who said, “Neither he nor his parents sinned; it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him.”

The next thing which happens is that Jesus, then, spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva, and smeared the clay on the eyes of the blind man.

(Question 1: Now imagine, you are the one born blind. You hear this conversation, then, you hear spitting, rubbing, then, mud being plastered on your eyes. After this is done to you, you receive the instruction, “Go wash in the Pool of Siloam.” How would we respond to this situation, not really knowing what was going on in the moment?)

Of course, the man did what Jesus told him to do. If we think about this, Jesus was asking the man born blind to participate in the miracle which was in progress. If the man born blind had walked away in disgust, we can only assume he would not have gained his sight, but because he had enough faith to follow the instructions given, the miracle was completed. So, the man born blind was sent and because of his obedience, the works of God were made visible through him.

So, let's look at what happens next. Obviously, people who had known the man born blind all of their lives took notice that this man could suddenly see.

(John 9:9-12)

8 His neighbors and those who had seen him earlier as a beggar said, “Isn't this the one who used to sit and beg?” 9 Some said, “It is,” but others said, “No, he just looks like him.” He said, “I am.” 10 So they said to him, “[So] how were your eyes opened?” 11 He replied, “The man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and told me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ So I went there and washed and was able to see.” 12 And they said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I don't know.”

(Question 2: The response of those who observed or heard of the event was one of bewilderment. What would our response be if a neighbor or acquaintance of ours, that we had known as blind since birth, was suddenly able to see and they told us it was because someone spit on the ground, made mud, smeared it on their eyes, and told them to go wash in the pool of Siloam, and when they did, were able to see?)

Of course, after the initial bewilderment, there was conversation and some division concerning what was witnessed or what people believed they had witnessed, as well as the opinions of those who heard of the event. Some were astounded, but others looked for some logical explanation, but there was another issue of concern. This healing took place on the sabbath when no work is allowed to work, so they took the blind man to the Pharisees to give an accounting.

(John 9:13-17)

13 They brought the one who was once blind to the Pharisees. 14 Now Jesus had made clay and opened his eyes on a sabbath. 15 So then the Pharisees also asked him how he was able to see. He said to them, “He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and now I can see.” 16 So some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, because he does not keep the sabbath.” [But] others said, “How can a sinful man do such signs?” And there

was a division among them. 17 So they said to the blind man again, "What do you have to say about him, since he opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet."

(Question 3: So, assume you are a person of some authority and the people come to you with an apparent violation of God's law, one of His most basic commandments, keep holy the sabbath. How would you respond to testimony of the man born blind and the people who brought this man to you for examination?)

So, the Pharisees decided to investigate whether this man had truly been born blind.

(John 9:18-23)

18 Now the Jews did not believe that he had been blind and gained his sight until they summoned the parents of the one who had gained his sight. 19 They asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How does he now see?" 20 His parents answered and said, "We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. 21 We do not know how he sees now, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him, he is of age; he can speak for himself." 22 His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone acknowledged him as the Messiah, he would be expelled from the synagogue. 23 For this reason his parents said, "He is of age; question him."

(Question 4: Let's put ourselves into the place of the parents. They did not witness the miracle, but they do know their son was blind, but now he sees. Of course, the politically correct posture as determined by the power elites of the day was that no one should acknowledge Jesus as Messiah. If they did, they would be deprived of their livelihood, exiled and left to fend for themselves in the desert. What would we do in this position? Punt as the parents did or embrace the miracle?)

Once more, the Pharisees call the man born blind to testify.

24 So a second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, "Give God the praise! We know that this man is a sinner." 25 He replied, "If he is a sinner, I do not know. One thing I do know is that I was blind and now I see." 26 So they said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" 27 He answered them, "I told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?" 28 They ridiculed him and said, "You are that man's disciple; we are disciples of Moses!" 29 We know that God spoke to Moses, but we do not know where this one is from." 30 The man answered and said to them, "This is what is so amazing, that you do not know where he is from, yet he opened my eyes. 31 We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if one is devout and does his will, he listens to him. 32 It is unheard of that anyone ever opened the eyes of a person born blind. 33 If this man were not from God, he would not be able to do anything." 34 They answered and said to him, "You were born totally in sin, and are you trying to teach us?" Then they threw him out.

(Question 5: Let us now put ourselves in the place of the Pharisees. We did not witness this miracle, but we certainly have had reports from various crowds as to the signs this man, Jesus,

has performed. He violates the sabbath, a holy day, by His works of healing. He is popular with the people, but is a blasphemer, a threat to the peace, as well as a threat to the power structure of the Pharisees. And what of this man born blind? Was not his affliction a symbol of his sin? What would our response be to such a situation of dubious testimony and reputations?)

The Pharisees rejected the testimony of the man born blind and threw him out, but the man born blind did not recant his story. Indeed, he had his own decision to make as to the miracle which transpired.

(John 9:35-39)

35 When Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, he found him and said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" 36 He answered and said, "Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?" 37 Jesus said to him, "You have seen him and the one speaking with you is he." 38 He said, "I do believe, Lord," and he worshiped him. 39 Then Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see might see, and those who do see might become blind."

(Question 6: Of course, more than any other person, the man born blind experienced and participated in the outcome of the miracle. He was blind, but then, he could see. As a beggar, he was not in a position of politics and his livelihood came at the mercy of the people. What would we do if we knew the truth, but sharing the truth would cause our exile, which, with our affliction, could also mean our death in the desert? What fear might we have? Would we have the courage to overcome that fear?)

The Pharisees heard the conversation and challenged Jesus who rendered his judgment of their position.

(John 9:40-41)

40 Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not also blind, are we?" 41 Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you are saying, 'We see,' so your sin remains."

(Question 7: As Jesus responded to the question of the Pharisees, He begins by saying, "If you were blind, you would have no sin. What is the meaning of this statement as well as His judgment that their sin remains?)

So far, we discussed the responses of the man born blind, the neighbors and citizens, the parents, and the Pharisees. Of course, there was another group present who witnessed the event, the disciples. Remember them from the beginning of the story? We did not really hear their response to the miracle, but we do know they kinda kicked off the conversation.

(John 9:1-3)

1 As he passed by he saw a man blind from birth. 2 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" 3 Jesus answered, "Neither he nor his parents sinned; it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him."

(Question 8: By this time, we can kind of expect that the miracles of Jesus were pretty much common place to them. As dedicated followers of Jesus, they did not need another miracle to gain their attention. Still, their question was not about how can we help this poor beggar, rather it was a curiosity as to who was to blame. **What significance does this have to the story and what message might this have for us in our day?)**

(Question 9: As we have discussed this story, we examined the responses of the disciples, the man born blind, the neighbors/citizens, and the Pharisees. **From our perspective of faith, who might we have been in the story?)**

Quotes:

We can believe what we choose. We are answerable for what we believe.
– *Cardinal John Henry Newman*

If we are intended for great ends, we are called to great hazards.
– *Cardinal John Henry Newman*

We are not called to be successful, but faithful.
– *Saint Teresa of Calcutta*

Final Thoughts:

I am drawn to this particular story in that it was my first opportunity to engage in catechesis. A little more than a year after I became Catholic, I offered my assistance to an RCIA team as a sponsor. I felt it a bit of a means of paying back the favor paid forward by those who led me through RCIA. Of course, I never intended to engage in catechesis, I was just looking to help someone, like me, who was trying to wrap their head around what it means to be Catholic and what God asks of us. Of course, you know the old joke of telling God your plans.

As the period of Lent approached where the candidates and catechumens experience the scrutinies, the RCIA team leader came to me and said that it is their tradition to have the sponsors present the stories of the raising of Lazarus, the woman at the well and the man born blind. He said the other two were already spoken for, so would I be willing to present the story of the man born blind? Of course, I raised the concern that I had been a Catholic for little more than a year and I would hardly be the person to present the story with any justice. The RCIA team leader smiled and said, “I’m sure you will do just fine.”

I asked if there was a lesson plan of sorts, and he replied, “Yes, John chapter 9.” As I inquired if there was anything that could help me with what to bring out about the story, he replied, “I’m sure the Holy Spirit will guide you,” then, he turned and walked away, leaving me clueless as to where I would go with the presentation and fill the hour I was allotted.

Over the years, I continued to present this story with a basic question. Who are we? Perhaps more than any other accounts of the miracles in the Bible, we see the responses of those who were involved, those who witnessed, those who heard, and those who judged. The story presents the challenges any of us might have in the face of a miracle.

The most common response I receive when I ask the question, “Who are we,” is that we might find we contain a little of all who are mentioned in the story. Through these 41 verses of scripture, we see:

Disciples – Faithful, but academic

Neighbors – Observing, bewildered and divided

Parents – Knowing but fearful, abstaining and looking for a way out of the controversy

Pharisees – Hearing, judging and rejecting

Man born blind – called, obeying, worshiping and thankful

If we look at our faith life, we might observe different moments in our journey where we could have filled any of the shoes related in the story. The question, though, is not about our past, but our future. What is the direction of our faith?

We might be tempted to say, we would not have questioned. We might be tempted to say, such an event would only strengthen our faith, but again, our observation is perhaps with the blessing of hindsight; but even today, are we certain about our response to such a miracle?

Unfortunately, we do not have enough time left to properly discuss that question, so, I will leave it to everyone to reflect and ponder.

Wrap Up: Again, our time has come to an end. We hope you will be able to join us next week as we continue our discussion of miracles and faith as we begin to take a look at post biblical miracles.

Let us conclude with a prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank you for this opportunity to open and discuss Your Holy Word. We pray that as we go our separate ways, You will continue to walk with us and help us to see how we may put on the armor of **truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation**, and the **Word** of the gospel not only for the benefit of our lives, but also the lives of all who cross our path. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, we pray. Amen.

Thank you all and God bless.

Next Session: Miracles and Faith – Part IV: Our Lady of Guadalupe