

There is a question that keeps being asked throughout that gospel. How does a man who has been blind from birth come to get his sight back? It is not something that he himself was able to do. The man himself tells everyone that it was the man named Jesus who cured him. But that leads to another question. Who is this man Jesus? More importantly, if he is curing a blind man is he from God or from the devil?

I don't think the man born blind had thought much about this. It is only when others start to question him that he has to look for a response. It is interesting to look at the way his response develops over the time when the religious leaders are demanding answers from him. He starts off by saying that he was cured by a man called Jesus. He probably didn't know much about this man. It is not as though he had searched out Jesus. Rather, Jesus had been walking along when the disciples saw the man and asked Jesus a question about him. So, Jesus approached him; he didn't approach Jesus. Later on, when the questioning from the religious leaders was getting more intense and they wanted an opinion about Jesus, the man who had been cured said that Jesus was a prophet. This was a step further in recognising who Jesus was. The man recognised Jesus as a man of God. Finally, when we get to the end, the man meets Jesus again and they begin a conversation. At the end of this, the man looks at Jesus and says, "Lord, I believe" and he worshipped Jesus. This is the end of the journey: he recognises Jesus as the Son of Man. This sort of journey takes time; it must be slow.

This is a story about the gracious action of God in the life of a person. It is the story of the change that happens in the life of this man. From a life that was lived in darkness, he came to live in the light. From a life that, in those days, would have restricted him and forced him to live in poverty, he came to experience freedom and dignity. From a life where he was regarded as a sinner, he was now in right relationship with God.

It is also a story that should encourage us during this time of Lent. It is very easy for us to turn Lent into a time when we just look at ourselves, asking if we are doing enough for Lent or how we might do more. But Lent is about what God is doing in our lives. Any Lenten penance we undertake is ultimately about making space for God. It is about noticing what God is doing. In this sense, we are a bit like the man who was blind from birth. We are on a slow journey to see more clearly. In the first place, it is about seeing God more clearly, especially seeing what God

has been doing in our lives. But it is also about seeing what God is doing in the world and what he might be asking of us.

If you have ever spoken to someone who has had cataract surgery on their eyes, they will usually tell you that they see very differently. They hadn't realised how limited their sight was before the operation. It can be a bit like that in our spiritual lives. To use the gospel language of light and darkness, we usually don't recognise the darkness in our lives until someone, or some situation shines a light on it. During Lent God shines that light so that we see more clearly. We see where we need to change, but we also see those bright aspects of our lives. To see the bright aspects is to see the presence of God in our lives. Like the blind man in the gospel, seeing with the eyes of faith leads to the praise and worship of God.

Today we also celebrate the Scrutiny with our candidates for baptism. They have been preparing for many months for their baptism at Easter, and we have been praying for them. The prayers of the Scrutiny pray that they may see Jesus more clearly and seek to follow him more closely. Our candidates have been on a journey of conversion. It is a slow journey so that they can allow God to be with them and love them. Just as for us during Lent, their journey is about what God is doing in their lives. We all need time to absorb God's action.

The journey our candidates are on and which we are on during Lent is taking us to Easter, where we will all make the profession of faith, just as the man born blind did when he encountered Jesus at the end. At the beginning of this story, Jesus had told the disciples that the man was born blind so that the works of God might be displayed in him. I think we can say the same about ourselves this Lent. Whatever penance we are undertaking, it is so that the works of God might be displayed. The works of God will be fully revealed at Easter when we celebrate new life in Christ. Let's all of us continue on the road to Easter with eyes wide open so that we might notice the works of God as we journey.