

# Sunday Homily

## 4th SUNDAY OF LENT

22 MARCH 2020

YEAR A

DIVINE OFFICE WEEK IV

“The man said, ‘Lord, I believe’, and worshipped him.”

### Illustration

Everyone told her that one day it would happen, but Karen was struggling so much with the language that she doubted it was going to happen for her. Karen was spending the summer in Paris studying French. She had always prided herself on her ability with languages, but after a few days among the Parisians she realised that her French was not nearly as good as it appeared in the classroom.

She was given much encouragement from those around her, and was constantly being told that eventually she would dream in French and it would all fall into place from then on. Every night she went to bed, praying this would be the night. Sure enough, after several weeks the night came and she dreamt in French; her brain was no longer translating from English into French. Finally, the penny had dropped and the language was coming naturally.

### Gospel Teaching

Characteristic of St John’s Gospel is the fact that the story operates at several different levels. There is the obvious recounting of the facts of a simple story and then there is the deeper theological message that gives real meaning to the story.

Initially the story begins with the disciples trying to understand who is to blame for the man’s blindness. It was commonly understood that someone with a serious ailment could attribute it to the sins of their forebears. Sickness and disability were equated with God’s displeasure and therefore regarded as a punishment. In today’s passage Jesus sweeps this misconception aside and turns the popular perception on its head, saying that the man’s blindness will be used to show the glory of the Lord, not the Lord’s displeasure.

The story progresses as one might expect: a man has been born blind, Jesus restores his sight, people doubt he was blind in the first place, an investigation takes place, people struggle to understand what has happened. Apart from Jesus, the only person in the story who really understands what has happened is the blind man himself, although his understanding comes gradually. St John is not concerned primarily with the man’s physical blindness but with his spiritual blindness and subsequent enlightenment.

Gradually the man understands. When he is first asked who cured him, he says, "The man called Jesus". When the Pharisees question him, and ask what he has to say about Jesus, he replies, "He is a prophet." Finally, when Jesus speaks with the man, the man born blind comes to the knowledge that Jesus is Lord and he makes his profession of faith, "Lord, I believe."

## Application

St John recognises that each member of the Christian community struggles with spiritual blindness during their spiritual journey. Coming to know the Lord can be an instantaneous experience, like that of St Paul. However, for most of the believing faithful it is a gradual process of fully appreciating and understanding the Lord's place and power in our lives.

Often we are so familiar with the prayers of the Mass that we can automatically and with ease make our profession of faith. The words "Lord", "Son of God" and other titles readily fall from our lips, but are they born out of a real knowledge of Jesus or are they more formulaic? The man born blind has no previous knowledge of Jesus or his true identity, but meeting Jesus changes his life and his outlook on life and its purpose. His belief in Jesus and his acceptance of Jesus as Lord mean that he will never be the same again.

We have a head start on the man born blind, as we know Jesus and his true identity; however, our discipleship may be hampered by spiritual blindness and that blindness may affect our ability to call Jesus Lord and worship him. Let us ask the Lord to open our eyes to the areas of our lives that stunt our spiritual growth and knowledge. It may be that we are selfish, prejudiced, hypocritical, lacking compassion and so forth, and yet do not see it and therefore are not able to worship the Lord as we would like.

Today's Gospel gives us encouragement, as it is a reminder that the spiritual journey is a process always directed towards enlightenment. It is gradual and as we progress along the way we gain ever more insight into ourselves and into the Lord. If we engage with it seriously and sincerely, the Lord will remove our lack of vision from us and one day we shall see him face to face.