



## Sunday of the Blind Man The Gospel According to John 9:1-38

“...I must work the works of those who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world”.



It is time to see. This is the time. There is no better time than this to see. A gentle time for the eyes. The light that doesn't blind us, but opens our eyes more. Who would have known that the light has a hand? The light that shows you the purity of heart in the multitude of its broken pieces. The light that lets you see, not like the angels, but as a human; whose purity of heart is not transparent, but deep and simple, full of signs of healing, from the past and those to come. The purity that can tell the shortness of darkness from the brightness of the light. The purity that does not remember the lie because in Truth life is established. Even the darkness is tributary to the Truth. Because it is the Truth that establishes the faith of the innocent soul held captive by the darkness. This is the complicity of the truth that keeps the innocence of the soul alive, while being captive in the darkness. And so, the darkness becomes pierced by innocence. A wound that becomes the active memory of the resurrection. Pierced by innocence, the darkness is wounded and is eternally waiting for the resurrection to happen. To be taken apart by light. Being universal, the resurrection happens in time and it surprises the darkness, which is no longer waiting eternally for it, but through time it is everlastingly conquered.

*“I have lived long enough to know that I myself have become an accomplice in the evil which, unfortunately, seems to prevail in this world, even an accomplice*

*of the one who will someday blindly strike me down.”*

Fr. Christian de Chergé -Abbey of Our Lady of Atlas in Thibirine, Algeria -before dying as a martyr on May 21, 1996. There are all kinds of levels of complicity with the darkness and with the captivity of sin. One would rather not remember. The deadly one, as Jesus said to the Pharisees, is when one claims to see but does the work of the darkness. To lie, in order for the blind to lead the blind into the pit. The life giving complicity is the blindness where the glory of God is manifested. Where blindness is real, with no trace of light slipping through the cracks. It is this blindness that opens completely to light when the sound of it touches your being. Now is the time to see the unseen and to worship God. The one Who talks to you. “You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you” (John 9,37). There is deep complicity in the death and darkness of man. The pain that comes from this is real and it touches everyone, the innocent and the oppressor. God takes us out from it by giving us eyes to see in darkness. So we are not blind anymore, but we can see both the face of God and the fear and pain of death; the innocence of the soul and the brute force of the violence; the genuineness of the truth and the cunningness of the lie. Everything we see, we see through the light in Christ. The darkness though is seductive, it hides and always tries to make lairs in the human heart. There will always be a complicity with the evil in this earthly life. The one that pleases God is the reverse of the Stockholm syndrome (i.e. when the abuse victims bond with their abusers). Here, the abusers become touched by the forgiveness of the victims, who have seen something in their heart unknown to men, yet shared by the Father with the Son. The darkness will try to make you believe that what you see is not real. Like in the gospel today. It wants you to believe that a human heart cannot attain purity. We need to keep repeating to them one thing and to ponder well on the words: “One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see.” God touches your eyes and opens a road of purity for the heart.

### **From the gospel during the week**

*“Therefore My father loves me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again...I and my Father are one. Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him”.*

One form of guilty complicity with evil is when you notice harm but do not really see it. Joanna told me how she notices at Queen and Sherbourne that people who are trapped by the evil of addictions are more and more younger, and more and more despised by others. She told me a story of how a young girl, to whom she tried to talk, was humiliated by an officer. Joanna replied to him that he should not talk behind their back but we should all pray for her. When you see evil and you don't pretend you have not seen it, you become an intercessor for the wounded young person in front of God. Like Joanna. Because you know, by trying, that the only thing that brings comfort in such moments, is prayer and kindness of the heart. When they feel rejection from all sides, at least one heart can offer them hospitality without trying to figure out the guilt of it.

There are many young people wandering on the streets with no place to lay their heads. Last Wednesday, I talked a little bit to one of them, who had been changing shelters several times a week. One cannot help but wonder: what do you see when you encounter a lost young person? Somebody was saying that adolescence is a time when the genius manifests; a time when the spirit looks to gain its innocence by freedom. When the consciousness discovers that it has a heart to share. The need of giving oneself instead of wasting yourself away is noticed. I guess in any generation there is turbulence between young people and their loved ones. I might be subjective, but I see today in our city more than that. On Wednesday, when I talked to our young visitor, the short discussion revealed that this person was hunted by a tense family situation. That is the matrix of many layers in a person's being. And that is present in any generation. Nowadays, I see something beyond the blame of the children and the guilt of the parents. I see a dark time that makes them captive, that waits for God to be glorified in it. -"It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him (today's gospel)-A superficial time fabricated to hide away the fulfilment of the good desire of their soul. A time emptied of meaning. We offer emptiness instead of life and we force them to comply with it. -And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink When I see young people wandering on the street I feel responsible for that. They look for the meaning that we fail to keep in our heart. They are searching for the purity of their heart. The one we fail to see. We need to reject being part of a world that complies with evil. We must not fall into a painful complicity with emptiness that silences the voice of the good shepherd, to keep the sheep from hearing it. Every day when we forget to listen to the Word of God through the scriptures or, literally, when we do not read from the scriptures, we condemn an innocent soul to blindness. Because they do not see the Word of God working in us with power. They do not see the need and thirst to be alive.

### **From the gospel during the week**

From John, ch. 8

*"Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death."*

*"Why do you not understand My Speech ? Because you are not able to listen to my Word. You are of your father the devil, and the desire of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the Truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and a father of it."*

### **More statistics**

I spent a little time at the mission this Saturday and I can say that it's been a long time since I've seen so much good work done together. There were volunteers working everywhere: in the bakery, on the second floor, building a new garden at the front and a new ramp at the back. Not to mention those who were serving in the room and those who were working in the kitchen. Everyone was working together and wearing masks. Most of the volunteers were young, with a real "joie de vivre". George, br Luke and sister Penka were responsible for organizing, inspiring and taking care of them. Something new and beautiful was taking form. It resembled a new born baby that I met on Friday in front of the mission. The parents had come to eat at the mission a few months before, when the mother was pregnant. This time they came to introduce young Lucas to us. Lucas is the 4th child of the young family. Seeing him you realize how fragile and beautiful life is. A silent voice was singing in his heart "Christ is risen!"

### **More statistics**

On Saturday Mark, our young homeless friend who likes to read, shared with me some facts from a book he was holding in his hand. Even though a bit outdated, the book contained some interesting facts. He said it shed some light on today's crisis. He told me that one third of the world was involved in a war; around 40 million children in India were working, many for free and starting as young as 5 year old. I did not check to see if the facts were true or not. But one was intriguing and shed some real light on the way the church is battling the crisis today. The book said that McDonalds` logo is more easily recognised around the world than the cross. Mark was telling me these facts to back up my biggest fear during the pandemic, which I shared with him: that when this is all over we'll go happily to what we had before, choosing to be blind to reality.

A world where the church waits for the rulers and kings to tell us if we are an essential service or not. To put a label on us so we can function according to some rules, having no more a conscience of goodness of our own. During the crisis, I did not follow closely whether the church is considered an essential service or not south of the border. I only heard bits and pieces on the radio. And I don't really want to know. I would rather be blind to it. It felt like a deep sadness took over your soul. How low can we go? Now we became a ping pong ball in the hands of the people with false power. And the sadness is that we like it. This reality today reminded me of a line in the movie Hobbit, where a subject addresses his leader: "Now, you sit on a throne with a crown on your head , but for me you never looked so little." The subject was upset with his king because he had given up on fighting for what was right, choosing instead to bow to money and wealth.

A more striking scene would be the one from the story of the naked emperor. We just refuse to listen to the innocent voice who tells us : “He ain’t got no clothes!”.

### **Br Luke -Stories during the pandemic (part 2)**

The other day at Scarborough, during Paschal hours, I turned around at the end and was surprised to see that a woman I had not seen for many months had slipped into the chapel and was praying with us. She looked pale and thin. Afterward we spoke outside in the drop in and she had a very quiet and gentle demeanor, more than I had remembered. It was apparent that she had been quite isolated for some time and was readjusting to people. She lives alone and had been keeping to herself. She says that she’s a social person and gets a lot of life and energy from people. She mentioned how she really misses going to church and told me that that day was the Friday of the Sacred Heart of Jesus gathering at her Catholic parish. I was surprised that she had slipped into prayer so seamlessly since she had been away for so long and it had not been announced. Additionally, coming to prayer meant going behind a line of tape and a staff table at the entrance of the chapel. The next week she brought in praise worship songs on her phone and said that when all this is over she will come and sing with us on Fridays.

One day near the end of the day at the mission, I was talking with a man on the steps of the mission. We were both enjoying the sun as the mission closed behind us. He asked me for a belt as his didn’t fit him anymore. He was talking about his past and his present. His face was swollen with sleeplessness and adversities. He told me he was sleeping in parks. I asked him what he saw as the purpose of his life. He paused for a moment and then said: “to live within God’s will, I suppose.” He explained that this meant for him being thankful for everything and helping the good around him. I eventually left him lingering on the steps and thought that what he had said was extremely sane.

A highlight early during Corona was a prayer service we had before lunch one day at Broadview. For some reason that day the room was packed with all manner of people. At the end of the prayer, Fr. Nicolaie started singing one of our Lenten hymns, “Lord of the Powers be with us.” Many joined in singing and the song had a special poignancy during a time of impending catastrophe. When we gathered after the prayer to sing the grace for food the same spirit was with us. One of our friends at the mission used to work at Wendy’s. He would come for breakfast after finishing his night shift at Broadview. Recently he lost his job and started living in a tent near lakeshore and carlaw. He would come to the mission periodically. I was hoping he would one day come and stay at the house with us. One day he came in and announced that he was going on a trip and wouldn’t be back for a long time. He wouldn’t say anything else about it, in his words, “can’t say... can’t say.” Before he left, we went to get a sandwich at Subway. The guy behind the counter was alone in an empty restaurant and said that they were doing only 10 percent of their business. The public washroom was closed and the hand sanitizer was behind the counter: out of our reach. We wanted to wash our hands before we ate but there was “no way.” It occurred to me that it would be hard for people on their street to wash their hands given almost all the public restrooms were closed. There weren’t many people on the street that day and it felt like the few there were giving dirty looks as we walked around. I’ve noticed this when walking with members from the mission. We seem to attract more hostile attention. I think it’s because the company seems more mixed and not strictly necessary/essential as compared with a couple walking down the street. Maybe everyone knows that there’s not many places to wash hands and eat safely out here so that those who live in the open have become likely carriers. Before he shuffled off around the corner, my friend broke the secret and whispered about his trip. “Don’t tell anyone, okay!” Something was very striking about this man, who was “a little slow,” as my grandparents would say, and how he was living. He was blowing around town with few places inside to go to and getting ready to go on a trip. He seemed very vulnerable with no one watching out for him but God. The contrast with him and the restaurant worker who wouldn’t squirt a little sanitizer over the counter for fear of contamination was startling.

At the start of the Coronavirus, I was searching for flowers with some community members and we decided to go to an upscale flower shop to ask if they had any old flowers for us. We weren’t an imposing group by any means but when we told the shop owner we were from St. John’s the owner of the store rushed out and warned us about the virus and explained why she was keeping a very safe distance. She lived with an elderly mother she told us. She said she’d maybe give us some flowers after the virus was over.

On Catholic good Friday in Scarborough, Father Roberto told me to take the old Blake Street cross and walk around the neighborhood and see what kind of interactions I would have. It was a very windy day and the wind kept catching the cross. We first visited a few homeless encampments in the bush nearby. Daisy and John were just waking up and surprised to hear we were open. Another couple we knew were having a screaming match over a garbage heap about whether or not to go to good neighbors. I met a few other people living in the bush. The people I met ignored the cross and talked to me regularly. There were other tents across the railroad bridge surrounded by beer cans. I went close and called inside but nobody came out so I walked on. Walked along the edge of the railroad tracks past the golf course and a steep ravine. Up through the suburbs. Not many people out. Up Kingston road for a long way. Big open road, cars could see me coming for a long way. Some honks. Mostly stares. People on the sidewalk avoiding eye contact. Many people

familiar from drop in were out and walking. A group of young black guys approached me on the sidewalk. They surprised me with a friendly greeting “ yeah, Jesus, right on man.” A little while later a woman approached and gave me a water bottle. She offered me a ride to wherever I might need to go. She says she and her son go to St. Boniface Catholic Church near Good Neighbors. She says Christians should be out doing this kind of thing. As I walked by a mosque, a car pulled up beside me and an Arabic guy wanted to know what this was for. He asked if he could buy the cross. When I passed by an Afghani bakery, I went in to buy some food for the rest of the company back at the drop-in. A fellow customer told me about how difficult this pandemic was for people back in Pakistan. He was surprised to hear we were still open and insisted on paying for my order. All in all, I was happy that Jesus was walking around the neighborhood, meeting people, and showing us that he was still there even though all the churches may be locked.

The pandemic made me think how people at the mission either choose, are drawn, or invited by some mysterious mix of the two, to live by God’s Grace. There’s a line from “Lord of the Powers” where we ask the Lord to be with us because ... “no other helper do we have in tribulation but you.” During the pandemic we witnessed tribulation fall most heavily on the people who come to the mission. One woman is homeless and mentally fragile. She is polite and quiet when you speak to her and cooperative. She pushes around a huge cart of stuff. In the winter time, early on Sunday morning she had been found sleeping on the bench outside the mission. During the pandemic she would sleep and stay at the mission from morning until close and always be the last one out. Sometimes she would exit the building and then go over to the bench outside and continue to sleep there. Who is watching out for her? What is the solution? I’ve seen her on the bench and when I look back, she’s gone and all her stuff too. It reminds me of the resurrection.

A troubled man came in to St. John’s. He says he appreciates this place because it’s the only one other than St. Stephen’s that lets you go inside and eat. Otherwise you get a packed up lunch handed through a door and you’re on the move. The police don’t want to let you stop, he says, and complains about how they follow him and harass him for stopping to rest at food courts. He says that people just want to make themselves secure and stable. That’s all they care about, he says.

At first during the league everyone talked about Corona nonstop. It was like it was the only news and it crowded everything out. Then life just went on and people adjusted and humor returned. One day it was the birthday of a Sri Lankan man at Good Neighbors. Alain, our cook, really pulls out all the stops for birthdays and will make the birthday person a special plate of food with fancy cut vegetables and something different. We usually have a card and song everyone signed to go along with it. We were all happy to see this man come in for his birthday but he soon thereafter left and we had everything prepared but he was gone. We eventually found him on the corner and most of us trooped out to sing a very maudlin birthday song and gave him his presents. He gave a sincere hug in return.

Talked to a guy at the mission. He gave short answers at first but then talked a lot. He told me he was from Belgium and his childhood had been hellish there. He said he was adopted by a family and it was hellish with them but they travelled around a lot. He told me he had travelled to over 22 countries. When he was 21 he left Belgium and came to California. He told me he knew Jean Claude Van Dam and that he was extremely arrogant in person. They had the same martial arts coach in Belgium. When he came to California he became involved in the weightlifting scene. He established himself but was eventually deported to Canada, a place where he had been born but had never lived. He snuck back into the states and was deported back again. Times have been hard for him in Canada because he says he doesn’t know anyone here and all his contacts are back in California. He said that he and his son know the rapper Drake and he has been contacting him for three years trying to set up an appointment. He asked if I could drive him to Drake’s house so they could talk in person. Prayer time!

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