

## Gospel text

### **John 9: 1-41**

1 As he walked along, Jesus saw a man who had been blind since birth. 2 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, whose fault is it? his, or his parents, for being born blind?" 3 Jesus answered them, "Neither he nor his parents were at fault, but this situation will give the opportunity to see God's actions through him. 4 As long as it is day, it is important that we all take action on behalf of the one who sent me. When the night comes, no one will be able to take any action whatsoever. 5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world". 6 After saying these things, Jesus spat on the ground and made mud with his saliva, then applied the mud to his eyes 7 saying to him, "Go and wash yourself in the pool of Siloam (which translates as "Sent"). So he went to wash, and came back seeing clearly. 8 So the neighbors and all those who knew him as a beggar said, "Wasn't he the one who sat by the roadside begging?" 9 Some said, "It is he." The others said, "Not at all, it's someone who looks like him." As for the blind man, he said, "It's me". 10 So they said to him, "How did your eyes open?" 11 He answered them, "The man whose name is Jesus made mud and applied it to my eyes, saying to me, 'Go and wash yourself in the pool of Siloam'. I went there and after washing myself I regained my sight. 12 Then they asked him, "Where is that one?" He replied, "I don't know".

13 They brought to the Pharisees the one who had been blind until then. 14 Now it was a Sabbath day that Jesus made mud and opened his eyes. 15 The Pharisees also asked him how he got his sight. He replied, "He applied mud to my eyes, I washed myself and now I see". 16 Some of the Pharisees therefore said, "It is impossible that this man should be sent by God, because he does not keep the Sabbath". But others said, "How is a sinful man able to do such actions that reveal the presence of God?" And they were divided among themselves. 17 They address themselves again to the blind man, "What is your point of view on the one who opened your eyes?" He replied, "He is a prophet".

18 The Jews refused to believe that he had been blind and had his sight restored before summoning his parents. 19 They said to them, "Is it your son, who you say was born blind? How is it that he sees now?" 20 The parents answered them thus, "We know that it is indeed our son who was born blind. 21 How does he see now? We don't know anything about it, just like we don't know anything about the one who opened his eyes. Ask him yourself, he is of legal age, he can answer for himself". 22 The parents said these words because they were afraid of the Jews. In fact, the Jews agreed to exclude from the synagogue anyone who confessed their faith to Christ. 23 This is why his parents said, "He is of legal age, ask him".

24 Then they called together the man who was born blind for the second time to say to him, "Honor the extraordinary quality of God's being. We know that this man is a sinner". 25 The latter replied, "As for whether he is a sinner, I know nothing about it. But I know one thing, I was blind and now I see". 26 They say to him, "But what did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" 27 He answered them, "I have already told you, but you did not listen. Why do you want to hear my story again? Do you happen to wish to become his disciples?" 28 They then insulted him and said to him, "You are the disciple of this man. We, on the other hand, are disciples of Moses. 29 We know that God spoke to Moses, but him we don't know where he is coming from". 30 The man retorted then these words, "This is what is astonishing: you do not know where he is coming from, when he opened my eyes? 31 We all know that God does not listen to sinners, but if someone is drawn to God and does his will, God is listening to such a person. 32 We have never heard of anyone who would have opened the eyes of a blind man since birth. 33 If this man was not sent by God, he would not be able to do anything". 34. They said to him, "You were born completely in sin and you are trying to teach us?" They proceeded to expel him.

35 Jesus heard of his expulsion. When he found him, he said to him, "You, do you believe in the new Adam?" 36 He replied, "But who is he, Lord, that I may believe in him?" 37 Jesus said to him, "You already know him, he is the one talking to you right now." 38 He began to confess his faith, "I believe, Lord". Then he bowed down to him. 39 Jesus said then, "It is really to make a discernment that I came into this world, so that those who cannot see can finally see, that those who pretend to see end up being blind."

40 Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard these words. They asked him, "Are we blind too?" Jesus answered them, "If only you would confess to being blind, you would be without sin. But in fact you say, "We see." So sin remains in you".

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## Gospel commentary - Homily

### **Does God exist?**

A professor of nuclear physics, trained at MIT in Boston, once taught a course at Quaid-i-Azam University in Islamabad, Pakistan to master's students in physics. He was trying to explain the physical forces at work during the earthquake that devastated Kashmir in 2005. When he finished his scientific explanation, the students raised their hands en masse to say, "Professor, you are wrong, the earthquake was caused by the wrath of God". We can smile at this naive world view of these Muslim students. However, I still remember my mother's comments when the weather was bad on June 29, on the feast of Peter and Paul the Apostle, "It is God who is telling us that he is not happy". No matter how much I told her that during this time it was still sunny in Hollywood, in the land of promiscuous behaviour, nothing helped. And we could add nonsense like, "If you have a lot of hardships, it's because God loves you".

This introduces the question of God's intervention in our world. This question is also linked to that of evil and all the misfortunes that can afflict us. A friend, although well committed to her Christian faith, recently looked after a teenage girl caught with cancer and, seeing all these seriously ill children at Montreal children's hospital, asked herself the question, "Does God really exist? How can he let children suffer?" Confronted with the same mystery of an imperfect and sometimes

destructive world, believers and unbelievers can come together here: if a good and loving God exists, why did he create a world with so many tears and suffering?

There is no answer to these questions. Let us look again at Jesus' response to these disciples in today's Gospel when they ask him to explain why a child was born blind. His response could be paraphrased this way: "I have no explanation, and don't waste your time finding a culprit. This will not bring any light. On the contrary, this kind of discussion will paralyze us in the status quo, because it will enclose us in our limits, in our limited horizon, in what we already know. Rather, let's look at such a situation as a call to our hearts and our minds to act, to find solutions, to help, and by doing that, we will be the arms and legs of God. By doing this, we will be moving forward toward infinite horizons to understand better by our very action the mystery of this world".

Let's look at ourself. When we are confronted with a loved one who is disabled, or who is injured, or who is suffering terribly, we act out of love, but also in the hope that our actions help to improve their lot. Likewise, any patient agrees to fight as long as he believes he can improve his situation. This faith can be nourished by the word of Jesus in the Gospel of today: "This situation will give the opportunity to see God's actions through him". In other words, not only disabilities and sickness are not the work of God, but the very act of caring for and working for people affected by life's hazards reflects the heart of God, puts us in tune with His action in the world. We are not alone because we work with God. Don't tell me, "But why didn't he make the world a better place to start with, so that we don't have to mend the mess?" Perhaps we should forget the image of the Almighty God, and turn to the figure of the all humble and all compassionate?

The key to understanding the Gospel of the blind-born is to grasp that we have to die to certain images of God to finally see clearly. Does God exist? Certainly not the one found in many of our images. Certainly not that of the Pharisees focused on their religious practices. I find revealing the gesture of Jesus to spit to create mud with his saliva in order to smear it on the blind man's eyes. It is by accepting this mud that the blind man will evolve towards the light. Can we not dare to compare the mud with the chamber pot here, thinking as much of the patient as of the person who has to empty it?

To try to understand this world is to try to know God. And accepting death to many of our ideas, do not we open the door to the one presented as the Light?

-André Gilbert, Gatineau, October 2007