

A. “Did this man sin, or his parents, that he was born blind.” First of all, this is a pretty dumb question the disciples ask: How could the man’s own sin cause him to be born blind? He couldn’t sin in his womb. It was a prevalent belief in the Judaism of Jesus’s day that illnesses or disabilities were a person’s own fault: People were sick because God was punishing them for their sins. If it wasn’t their sins, then they bore the burden of their parent’s sins: The verse from the Old Testament which said “ the sins of the fathers will be visited upon their sons” was taken very literally. But, be it personal blindness or global pandemics, in neither case is God punishing anyone. Sickness does give him a new, broad “workspace”, though: in order to show his power to overcome it.

The man wasn’t born blind because of anyone’s sin. He was given his blindness so that God’s work might show forth in him: He was given his blindness in anticipation of the moment that Jesus would miraculously restore his sight.

The way Jesus does this is meant show us his mastery over creation. If he wanted to give the man his sight back, he could have just thought the thought of giving him his sight back. Especially these days, do not try his preferred method at home; nevertheless, get his point. He spits on the ground, makes mud with his saliva, smears the man’s eyes with it, and tells him to wash it off. Just as God *made* man from the clay of the earth, Jesus is *remaking* this man from the clay of the earth. He doesn’t only bring his physical outward sight back, he also gives the man spiritual *insight* to believe in the Lord Jesus as the Messiah.

The man can see this, yet the Pharisees are blind to it. They think they can see the world as it really is. They think those who believe in Jesus--and have that belief shape how they see the world--are the ones blinded by ignorance. It’s much like the situation today where our

secularized culture views people who believe in Jesus as the ones who don't get it, especially if they show deep conviction in that belief.

And this Gospel story speaks to our situation today. John is telling us about an event that actually happened in the life of Jesus, but his story makes a larger symbolic point: Jesus needs to work a miracle for us so that we can recover from our spiritual blindness, and see the world as it really is: having Jesus Christ at its center.

And the miracles that Jesus works use the stuff of creation to re-create us: ordinary water is poured on our heads in Baptism and we are miraculously transformed from creatures of God the Creator to children of God our Father. Ordinary words are spoken in the Sacrament of Penance and we are miraculously transformed from the state of sin to the state of grace, or in the Sacrament of Matrimony miraculously transformed from one man and one woman, to husband and wife, called to be father and mother. Ordinary bread and wine is miraculously transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ, and, upon that offering at the hands of the priest, we are, in turn, miraculously made ourselves into the Body of Christ. Whether it's offered by the priest alone, or the Pope in the midst of thousands, the Eucharist makes us the Church.

The Sacraments are God's miraculous intervention in our lives. They give us sight so that we believe in Jesus and live our lives in his light. He is the light that shines on our world so that we can see it as it really is: not the light of a television set or a computer monitor. Not "the light" that so many New Age philosophies talk about. If we say that we can see by those lights, and not the light of Christ, we are in fact blind.

And Christ's light shines through his Church. The Church dispenses the miracles of God in the Sacraments, she preaches the Word of God in the Scriptures, as it is seen in the light of all the teachings of Christ.

Is Christ the light that we use to see? Do we see that the Coronavirus and all that may come with it--ranging from our own sickness, our inability to come together in worship, or merely our own inconvenience--is the canvas for the work of God to show forth in us? A Christian is thankful for the light that produces the “bright side” of our current shared angst: from being reunited with our spouses and children, who, as it turns out, live under the same roof we do, to rediscovering a relationship with God in personal prayer, to bringing those now congregating in your “domestic church” together in shared prayer. Do we see by the light which Christ shines on our brothers and sisters in need, and provide them with either hands-on help or financial help? It all makes for “new eyes” by which to see Christ and see one another, and be grateful. Yes, it’s still the case that we can’t wait until things return to (what passes for) normal. In the meantime: “this happened not because anyone sinned, but that the work of God” might be brought to light.