

by Joan Mitchell, CSJ

Place a closed bible and unlighted candle at the center of your group. Each makes an “I have been blind to...” statement aloud. Then open the bible, light the candle and pray together.

LEADER: God, light up our minds as you light up the day at dawn.

ALL: Bless our seeing for faith and our speaking for truth.

LEADER: Help us see with our hearts as well as with our eyes.

ALL: Grace us with insight. Amen.

Where do we find God? One common answer is deep within. How do we find God deep within? Common answers include time for solitude and silence, time to listen to one’s own aspirations and desperations apart from those of others in our lives. A retreat can help us sort what and who we really value or maybe we need a little time with a fishing hook in the water.

The man born blind in Sunday’s gospel finds God in a different place, in encounters with others outside himself. Explaining his new eyes to neighbors, teachers, and parents helps him find words to identify the man who gave him sight. He finds God in dialogue, in the space between us, where grace and amazement attend our efforts to bridge our separate selves and glimpse the mystery we each are.

SUNDAY

by SUNDAY

Traditionally Lent is about fasting, eating less or maybe better. It’s about recognizing what drives us—to eat, spend, drink, gamble, veg, work too much. Fasting can help us break patterns and free our spirits to build healthier, holier lives and use neglected gifts.

Some of us may need to fast from friends or family who dump on us rather than deal with their problems or perhaps overestimate their closeness. Lent is the time for a spring cleanup that makes room for new life.

St. Ignatius, the founder of the Society of Jesus, encouraged his priests to use a simple, daily form of prayer called the Examen. It is an examination of the events and feelings we experience each day, an examination of consciousness, not conscience. It involves taking

a short reflective time each day, usually evening. Sit quietly.

Step one. Remember the day. Who did I see and interact with? What did I hear? What did I feel? What energized me, led me toward life and love? Express gratitude to God. Families might simply share at dinner what each feels grateful for and what was hard.

Step two. Remember and feel any regrets in an event or interaction. Ask for God’s help. Over time pay attention to recurring feelings and insights and follow tugs toward more that God asks of you. It’s a way to see with new eyes like the man in Sunday’s gospel. Ask God’s help.

● **What encounters or events keep surfacing in your reflective moments this Lent? Where do they point?**



GOSPEL

Jesus gives sight to a man born blind.

SCENE 1

NARRATOR: As Jesus walked along with his disciples, they saw a man who had been born blind. Jesus spat on the ground and made some mud. He rubbed the mud on the man's eyes.

JESUS: Go wash in the Pool of Siloam.

NARRATOR: *Siloam* means *sent*. The man went, washed, and came back seeing.

SCENE 2

NEIGHBOR 1: Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?

NEIGHBOR 2: No, he just looks like him.

MAN BORN BLIND: I am the man.

NEIGHBOR 1: How were your eyes opened?

MAN: The man named Jesus made some mud, rubbed it on my eyes, and told me, "Go to Siloam and wash." So I went, and as soon as I washed, I could see.

NEIGHBOR 2: Where is he?

MAN: I do not know.

SCENE 3

NARRATOR: Then they took the man who had been blind to the Pharisees. The day that Jesus opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath.

PHARISEE 1: How did you receive your sight?

MAN: Jesus put mud on my eyes, I washed it off, and now I can see.

PHARISEE 2: The one who did this cannot be from God. He does not obey the Sabbath law.

PHARISEE 1: But how could a sinner do such mighty works as these?

NARRATOR: They were sharply divided about Jesus. They spoke again to the blind man.

PHARISEE 3: You say Jesus opened your eyes. What do you say about him?

MAN: He is a prophet.

SCENE 4

NARRATOR: These teachers were not willing to believe that the man had been born blind and begun to see, so they called his parents.

PHARISEE 1: Is this your son? If he was born blind, how is it that he can now see?

FATHER: This is our son. We know he was born blind. We do not know how he can see now, or who opened his eyes.

MOTHER: Ask him. He can speak for himself.

NARRATOR: His parents feared the Jews who had agreed among themselves that anyone who believed Jesus was the messiah would be put out of the synagogue.

SCENE 5

NARRATOR: A second time the teachers called in the man born blind.

PHARISEE 2: Promise before God that you will tell the truth! We know the man who healed you is a sinner.

MAN: I do not know if he is a sinner or not. I do know one thing; I was blind, and now I can see.

PHARISEE 3: What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?

MAN: I already told you that, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples?

PHARISEE 1: You are his disciple; we are disciples of Moses. We know that God spoke to Moses. We don't have any idea where Jesus comes from!



What do you see in the art?

MAN: How strange! You don't know where he comes from, but he opened my eyes. We know that God doesn't listen to sinners; God listens to those who respect God and do what God wants them to do. Since the beginning of the world, no one has heard of someone opening the eyes of a man born blind. Unless this man came from God, he could not have done such a thing.

PHARISEE 2: You were born and raised in sin—and you are trying to teach us? Get out of the synagogue!

SCENE 6

NARRATOR: Jesus heard that the teachers had expelled the man born blind and went to talk to him.

JESUS: Do you believe in the Son of Man?

MAN: Tell me who he is, sir, so I can believe in him.

JESUS: You have already seen him. He is speaking to you now.

MAN: I believe, Jesus.

The man born blind speaks his truth.

Sunday's gospel begins as a miracle (scene 1) but continues as a faith drama, a series of scenes in which a man born blind explains to neighbors and teachers how he got his sight and who this person is who gave him sight. As the man tells his story, he sees with increasing clarity who Jesus is. Reread and explore the story of his journey for yourself, using the directions below.

- Give titles to the six scenes as a way of identifying what happens in each and how the conflict grows.
- In which scenes is Jesus central? In which, the man born blind? Note all the places the man born blind repeats the story of his healing.
- Underline the statements the man makes about who Jesus is. What steps do you see in the faith journey of the man born blind?

Scene 1 tells a simple story of a physical healing; however, miracle stories in John's gospel are never simple and never called miracles. They are *signs* that reveal Jesus. In Sunday's gospel the gift of sight, which the man receives from Jesus in scene 1, sets him off on a journey of insight into who his healer is (scenes 2-6).

The man with new eyes becomes the central character in scenes 2-5. In your bible study you may have noticed that the man says less in each scene about the miracle and more about who Jesus is. When his neighbors first question how he came to

see, the man simply recounts all Jesus' actions.

When neighbors take the man to the Pharisees in scene 3, the man born blind repeats some of what happened to him and then reflects—Jesus must be a prophet. His controversy with these strict teachers of the law helps the man see Jesus in a new way.

In scene 5 after his parents insist the man must speak for himself, he tells his story in eight words, "I was blind, and now I can see," but he reflects at length on who his healer must be and makes an argument that anyone who heals a man blind from birth must be from God. His healing is a sign that reveals Jesus for the man but remains a sin in the eyes of the Pharisees. The blind man sees; the seeing teachers remain blind.

Ask yourself the questions the man born blind answers:

- How were my eyes opened?
- How did I receive my sight?
- Where is Jesus?
- Do I believe in the Son of Man?



Sunday's gospel tells in one story two layers of history—a mud layer and a water layer. The mud layer is Jesus' historical ministry (A.D. 30), in which Jesus in person smears mud on a man's eyes. However, Jesus sends the man to the pool of Siloam to wash. Only in washing does he receive his sight.

This detail suggests this story also tells a later history about Christians, who become Jesus' followers through baptismal washing. The man born blind represents both a man who encounters Jesus and a character in the gospel with whom the Christian community identifies and through whom they tell their story.

Bible scholar J. Louis Martyn suggests we glimpse in the parents' fear the conflicts parts of the Christian community faced in the A.D. 90s. The parents fear those in their synagogue who have agreed to put out anyone who confesses Jesus is the messiah.

No one is certain when or in what synagogues divisions arose between disciples of Jesus and disciples of Moses. However, after the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70, a number of rabbis formed an academy in the town of Jamnia. From this school modern Judaism grew. Scenes 4 and 5 picture the man born blind and his community experiencing tensions that ultimately force

Jews to take sides and become separate groups.

The gospel tradition equates a healing encounter with Jesus and a baptismal encounter. In Jesus' absence—the middle of Sunday's gospel—the man with new eyes speaks the truth of his experience. In his witness, he progressively finds words and gains insight into who Jesus must be. His witness models the value of articulating and sharing our own experience of God and of persisting in dialogue with those who challenge us. He calls us to continue his story as our own.

- What conflicts call you to speak your experience of God's Spirit stirring in you?
- What insight does this gospel give you about the value of faith sharing?



Samuel anoints David.

The anointing of David is another great moment in the history of Israel which the Lenten first readings recall. David is the youngest of eight sons, a youth who is God's choice to be king, but not the prophet Samuel's first pick. The outpouring of the Spirit upon David manifests God's blessings on him.

God chooses a king.

God said to Samuel: "I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem, for I have chosen my king from among his sons." As Jesse and his sons came to the sacrifice, Samuel looked at Eliab and thought, "Surely this is God's anointed." But God said to Samuel: "Do not judge from his appearance or from his lofty stature, because I have rejected him. Not as humans see does God see, because humans see the appearance but God looks into the heart." Jesse presented seven sons before Samuel, but Samuel said, "God has not chosen any of these."

Then Samuel asked Jesse, "Are these all the sons you have?" Jesse replied, "There is still the youngest, who is tending the sheep." Samuel said to Jesse, "Send for him; we will not begin the banquet until he arrives." Jesse sent and had him come. The young man was ruddy and handsome with beautiful eyes. God said, "Arise and anoint him, for this is the one." Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed David in the presence of his brothers. The Spirit of God grew strong in David from that day on.

1 Samuel 16.1,6-7,10-13

- Whose appearances have fooled you into misreading their capabilities?
- In what young people do you see promise? What does the Spirit speak in them?
- Who in your community of faith or service do you want to anoint for leadership?

PRAY

Pray together to conclude your reflection on the journey of the man born blind into seeing, believing, and professing his faith.

LEADER: Once we were in darkness but now we live in the light of God.

ALL: Light produces every kind of goodness, justice, and truth.

LEADER: Once we were blind but now we see.

EACH: (Make a personal statement of faith.) I once was blind but now I see...

LEADER: We believe in God, who is three persons in one love. What do we believe about the Creator of all that is?

Group responds.

LEADER: What do we believe about Jesus the messiah, God's Son who has become one of us, in whose footsteps we walk this Lent? *Group responds.*

LEADER: What do we believe about the Spirit, who animates the communion of saints, living and dead? *Group responds.*

ALL: Loving God, you bless us with the light of life. Your goodness and kindness follow us all the days of our lives.



If you can't get your family to church, bring church to them. Celebrate a passover supper in your own home. Easy to use script and instructions are at goodgroundpress.com

Joan Mitchell, CSJ, the editor of *SUNDAY BY SUNDAY*, holds a Masters of Theological Studies from Harvard Divinity School and a Ph.D. in New Testament from Luther Seminary in St. Paul.