

***Homily-Reflection for the  
The Sixth Sunday of Pascha 2017  
Sunday of the Man Born Blind***

Christ is Risen! In the name of the Father of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

When thinking of the Man Born Blind, a question comes to mind:  
Do WE want to be touched by God? Is such a thing today even possible?

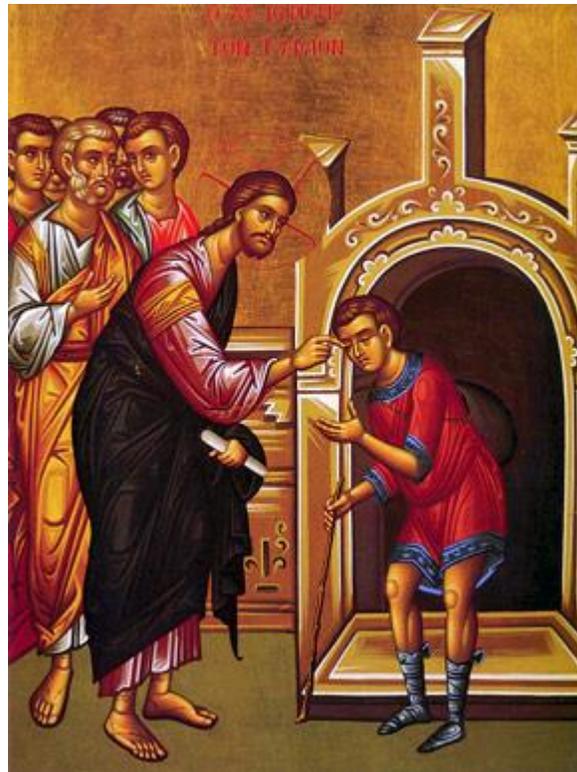
At Pascha the Byzantine Church changes gears and begins reading from the Gospel of St. John. This is for a historical reason.

Because it is so sacramental in tone, some consider the Gospel of John to be written as a sort of catechism on the Sacraments for those who were newly Baptized in the faith.

We know from early Church writers, like St. Cyril of Jerusalem, that catechumens would prepare for several years before they made their Profession of Faith, received Baptism and became full members of the Church.

During this time they were formed in Gospel morality, a basic understanding of the Scriptures and how we are saved through Christ.

Their Baptism usually took place at the Paschal Vigil at the eve of the Resurrection of our Lord. On this ---holiest of all evenings--- the catechumens would be fully initiated. Only then would their catechesis in the sacraments begin ---along with reading St. John's Gospel to help immerse them in the meaning of the Sacraments. So Pascha is also a time to celebrate the holy Sacraments!



St. John's Gospel is filled with Jesus' sacramental references and analogies. He records Jesus' words about our need to be Baptized with water and to receive the Holy Spirit through Chrismation (JOHN CHAPTER THREE).

He relates Jesus' explicit words that unless we eat His body and drink His blood, we have no life in us (JOHN SIX).

He tells us of our Lord's miracle at the Wedding of Cana (JOHN TWO) and in today's Gospel (CHAP 9), John relates the healing Jesus brought through Anointing.

John shows how Jesus empowered His Apostles (and by extension His Church) with the authority to forgive sins (CHAP 20).

Finally St. John records how Jesus "breathed" on His Apostles and bestowed on them the grace of Holy Orders (JOHN 20), imparting to them (and their successors) the sacramental priesthood of Jesus Christ, without which there would be no sacraments.

But what is a sacrament and what is their meaning for us? St. Augustine, a great 4th c. Latin Father gave the famous explanation that sacraments are "outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual divine graces."

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states, "the *sacraments* are [effective] signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us" (CCC 1131).

Orthodox understanding of the sacraments is the same: they are ways in which God imparts His Life and Divine Energy to us (cf. OSB, 1786). This is why in Eastern theology, following the early Church and St. Paul himself (Eph 5:32), we refer to Sacraments as "Mysteries" because, in a mystical way, in them we are truly touched by God.

Here lies the significance of being a Sacramental Church. Whereas other Christian groups don't have a sacramental priesthood Catholics & Orthodox do.

This means we don't just come to Church to hear God's Word through preaching and teaching (important as these are), we come to actually receive God in His sacraments. This is why St. Peter states that Christians can be partakers of the Divine Nature (2 Pet 1:4). The sacraments give us God!

Today our Lord touches and anoints the man born blind and he receives his sight. The Apostles, through the power of God, touch the woman with the clairvoyant spirit and she is healed. Since the time of our first parent's sin, mankind lost his vision of God. We are all born blinded in sin. As a result we all have a need for God's healing touch.

The Universal Catechism states, "The seven *sacraments* touch *all* the *stages* and *all* the important moments of Christian *life*" (CCC 1210).

In Baptism we die and rise with Christ & the seed of faith is planted in our souls. Through Chrismation we receive the ever-abiding gift of the Holy Spirit our Helper and Comforter. Through Holy Communion we receive Jesus Christ and are intimately united with Him.

Through Holy Matrimony we don't just celebrate the mere human love of a man and a woman, God's Divine power is conferred onto their wedded union enabling them to be faithful & loving to one another until death do them part.

Through Confession we receive forgiveness of sins and the power to victoriously overcome them.

Through Anointing we receive healing and strength and the grace to be ready to meet God --- with confidence in His resurrection--- at the end of our life.

And through Holy Orders our clergy receive God's power to perform their sacred service for God's people.

As I was reflecting on this Sunday's Gospel, I had to take my son Anthony for an important eye exam to find out whether he would need another surgery to save his vision in his right eye. Since the exam was near my work, I brought him with me that day.

On our way in, we drove past the Fr. Solanus Casey Capuchin Monastery. So I asked the newly beatified "saint-to-be" to pray for my son's vision. Earlier that week I had actually gone to Confession there and prayed at Bl. Solanus' tomb.

Then once we arrived at work, it dawned on me, I work at a Seminary! I could take Anthony to the Divine Liturgy that day so he could receive our Lord in Holy Communion for strength ---no matter what the results of the exam would be.

Then, thinking of strengthening, it further dawned on me: my work place is loaded with priests! There was a chance I could ask one of them to give Anthony anointing for strength and possible healing!

So by the end of the day & week I had received God's forgiveness in confession, prayed at the tomb of a holy saint-to-be, asked his intercession for my son, helped my son to receive the Holy Communion as well as the sacramental Mystery of Anointing!

Following all of this, as I sat in the waiting room for Anthony, it dawned on me as I reflected on meaning of the Sunday of the Man Born Blind. What was it that this blind man needed? He needed to be touched by God. Isn't this what Anthony and all of us need?

Although I didn't have a million dollars to give my son the best health care on earth, as a Christian, I actually had something far greater. Anthony received what we all need: The chance to be touched by the grace of God, the chance to put our faith and trust in His power and His loving will for our lives ---knowing that no matter what happens, being that our God is a loving God, He will work all things out for the good of our salvation (Rom 8:28).

If we want to be touched by God all we have to do is come to Him in His holy sacraments and receive Him with faith. Whether we are healed of our physical afflictions ---or not--- is His business. But if we put our trust and faith in Him, we WILL be healed ---healed from everything that separates us from Him and His power in our lives. This is the gift that we have as Christians and members of His Holy Church: Just like the man born blind... we too can be touched by God.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Christ is Risen!

Sub-Deacon Lazarus Der-Ghazarian

A.D. 2017