Homily: 4th Sunday Lent, yr. B (using A readings)

Depending on how you want to look at it, this narrative is actually comical. According to one writer, it’s much like one of those comedy stories of the Keystone Cops from the silent movies. The Keystone Cops seemed to have had all kinds of energy but were so inept they were never able to solve anything. A man born blind is healed by JESUS, but no one seems to be very happy about it. Some don’t want to believe it; they say the man who can now see is NOT the same man who was begging earlier; and some want to know exactly how JESUS healed him. The Pharisees then jump in to say that JESUS couldn’t have healed the man because JESUS doesn’t keep the Sabbath. The Pharisees then go after the man’s parents. But they’re too nervous about getting involved in the whole thing and they toss it back to their son. It seems everyone is rehashing the same thing over and over again expecting to find a different answer because a poor blind man has been healed by someone WHO wasn’t supposed to have that kind of power. Again, much like the keystone cops in the Silent movies, who were known for running energetically in every direction, but never solving anything. Because everyone is so excited, no one is actually paying attention to the blind man now able to see, who is quietly but most definitely going through a transformation. Much like the Samaritan woman last week, he is slowing, but very surely coming to Faith. The blind man’s first perception of JESUS is that HE is just a man. A remarkable man, but still just a man. The beginning of his spiritual sight is revealed when the Pharisees question him. What do you have to say about JESUS, since HE opened your eyes? The blind man, now able to see, responds; HE is a Prophet. It seems the more he thinks about what happened, the more convinced he becomes that JESUS must be more than just another man. HE must be a Prophet. Later on in the day, the blind man, now able to see, meets JESUS face to face. Remember JESUS was no longer around when the man returned able to see after washing in the pool of Siloam. JESUS asks; Do you believe in the SON of MAN? The man answers: Who is HE sir, that I may believe in HIM? JESUS Proclaims; the ONE speaking with you is HE. His transformation is now fully revealed. I do believe, LORD and he Worshiped HIM. He perceives JESUS to be more than a man, more than a prophet; he now perceives JESUS to be the LORD. The man’s spiritual sight, his gift of Faith, is far more miraculous and far more important than his gift of physical sight. In the course of the narrative, the healed blind man and the Pharisees move in opposite directions; the man moves toward the light of faith and understanding, while the Pharisees plunge deeper and deeper into the darkness of willful ignorance and isolation from the love of GOD. For the healed blind man, the love of GOD becomes real, in and through the Compassion of JESUS. If you haven’t already noticed, JESUS spent a lot of HIS time breaking down barriers. Yes, HE broke religious rules as well as social and cultural rules, not because HE was a sinner, but because HE wanted to give people an experience of GOD’S Love firsthand. HE wanted to restore the outcast and the lonely; HE wanted to heal and make whole the blind, the deaf and the lame. HE wanted everyone to know GOD’S Love for them, despite their sins and physical disabilities. Remember in those days, you were sick or disabled because of sin; an attitude revealed in the questioning of the disciples at the beginning of the Gospel. Today’s narrative about the healed blind man brought to the enlightenment of Faith by JESUS carries with it the theme of John’s whole Gospel: from darkness to light in CHRIST. A theme throughout the narrative is also about knowing or not knowing. Who knows and how one knows is also central to the story. The man tells his neighbors he doesn’t know where JESUS is, but the man clings to his experience of JESUS. HE put clay on my eyes, I washed, and now I see. The man is on a journey of Faith, he grows in his knowledge of JESUS. The Pharisees are so certain, so smug in what they think they know, that they aren’t open to JESUS at all. The blind man is anointed with JESUS’S saliva, and when he washes in the pool in obedience to JESUS, the Spirit begins to take over his life. With each new encounter with either neighbor or Pharisee, he grows stronger and stronger and aligns himself more and more with the person of JESUS, until toward the end of the narrative, standing up for JESUS, he is thrown out of the synagogue. The Pharisees, on the other hand, become increasingly blind throughout the narrative, and by the end, they are clinging to their spiritual blindness, with eyes tightly shut. Why would anyone choose that? One author responds, some would rather live in the darkness they know, than risk life in the light they don’t know. Lent is a time to recover from spiritual blindness, a time to ask ourselves important questions. Are we willing and ready to go deeper? Are we willing and ready to spend more time in prayer, reading Scripture or other books that can deepen our Faith as well as charity? Are we willing and ready to be more generous with time, talent and treasure? Are we willing and ready to allow a greater generosity in our lives to extend even beyond Lent? Disciples of CHRIST are always willing; being ready is a whole other question. The Eucharist however, the Gift of CHRIST’S Body and Blood is what can answer the ready question. The Eucharist has the Power to enable us to do all that GOD calls us too. The Eucharist empowers us to be on Mission, to pick up our Cross and Follow wherever the SPIRIT might lead. Right now, in the Diocese of San Diego, we are all being called to support the Annual Catholic Appeal, as I’ve been saying for the last couple of weeks. An opportunity to share treasure with those less fortunate, and those who need our support. Catholic Charities, one program supported by the Appeal, is all about making sure the poor are fed, the naked clothed, the homeless sheltered, to name just a few of their ministries. We’ve all seen first-hand the desperation of so many in San Diego County who are now homeless. GOD knows how it’s all going to be solved; and one organization can’t do it all; but with our support, Catholic Charities can do something and can put a dent, so to speak, in the vast numbers who are now living anywhere but in a home with a roof over their heads. As your pastor, I am asking you to please support the Annual Catholic Appeal. Again, you can make a one-time donation, or you can make a pledge you pay off throughout the year. This is our once-a-year opportunity to support the diocese in their efforts to proclaim the Gospel. We aren’t solely the parish of St. Louise de Marillac; we are also the Diocese of San Diego. We are Catholics that not only make up a parish, but we make up a diocese as well. And again, I want to emphasize that the rebates we receive after we reach our assessment goes a long way in supporting this parish as well. Envelopes remain in the pews or on the table at the back of church.... The Evangelist John was writing to a persecuted community. The healed blind man became a model of courageous witness. Again, he stands up for JESUS several times in the course of the narrative even when this means being thrown out of the synagogue. We, who have been enlightened by Baptism are called to confess and witness to our Faith even when we are slandered, ridiculed, or persecuted. We, who now see because of the Gift of Faith are called to stand firm through any storm or challenge. May the healing power of the SON of MAN continue to enlighten and strengthen us, that with the healed blind man, we will be able to proclaim loud and clear, every day of our lives, that we believe.