

REFLECTION

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*"One thing I do know is that I was blind and now I see."
(John 9:1-41)*

LENT 2020
Fourth Sunday

My postgrad service experience wasn't with the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, but I still love the unofficial motto that pops up in JV circles all the time: "Ruined for life." I can relate. One summer during college, I helped lead high school students on faith-based service immersion experiences. I went into the work thinking of it as a mere summer job, one stop on my road to a career as a sportswriter. But then I had the most powerful few months of my life, and I had new sense of what "vocation" meant: I was going to devote my life to social justice ministry because I had no other choice. God was calling me. Everything changed, and my life plans were ruined. I know a lot of fellow volunteers have similar stories.

The man born blind in today's Gospel passage has a similar moment of life-changing clarity. I'm not sure who this Jesus guy is, he says. "One thing I do know is that I was blind and now I see." The world has opened up to him, and by the end of the passage, he is worshiping Jesus, his values totally transformed. We're not always blessed with such sudden, dramatic moments of clarity – I know I sometimes hunger for the fresh energy and zeal I felt that summer 15 years ago. But God is always there, reaching out to us in quiet ways, inviting us into deeper relationship with Him and with our sisters and brothers. How might God be trying to open my eyes today?

PRAYER

Loving God, give us clear vision. Help us to see those living on the margins not as the world sees them, but as You see them. When we feel weighed down by injustice, cynicism or complacency, give us the zealous faith of the man born blind, whose encounter with Christ changed everything. This Laetare Sunday, as we rejoice in anticipation of the Resurrection, renew our spirits fill us with your peace. We pray this through Christ, Our Lord, AMEN.

Focus: SOCIAL JUSTICE

At the beginning of the passage, Jesus' disciples want to know who sinned, the blind man or his parents, that led to the man's suffering. His suffering wasn't caused by anyone's sin, Jesus corrects them. This is an important reminder. Even subconsciously, we can be tempted to blame those living on the margins of society for their own situations. But as Pope Francis reminds us when he talks about building a culture of encounter, the Gospel response to injustice is to not to judge, but to get to know people living on the peripheries and grow to love them. If we do this, we won't be able to help ourselves from working to transform the systems and structures that oppress them.

SERVICE SUGGESTION

One theme of Laetare Sunday, this day of rejoicing and rose-colored vestments in the middle of the solemn Lenten season, is that we rejoice despite the darkness that surrounds us. Or, as Wendell Berry writes, "Be joyful though you have considered all the facts." No matter what form of service you might participate in the remainder of this Lenten season, my invitation to you is to consciously be one level more joyful than you'd typically be going into a service experience. I don't mean you have to be overcaffeinated or super-smiley if that's not your way. I like this description of joy by the theologian Henri Nouwen. Bring some of this with you into service: "Joy is based on the spiritual knowledge that, while the world in which we live is shrouded in darkness, God has overcome the world."