

My Beloved Ones,

This Sunday's Gospel is another of our Lord's miracles: the healing of the blind man. As St. John tells us that this man was blind from birth, this means that he has never seen the sun, the moon, or the stars—in short he has never been able to see God's visible creation.

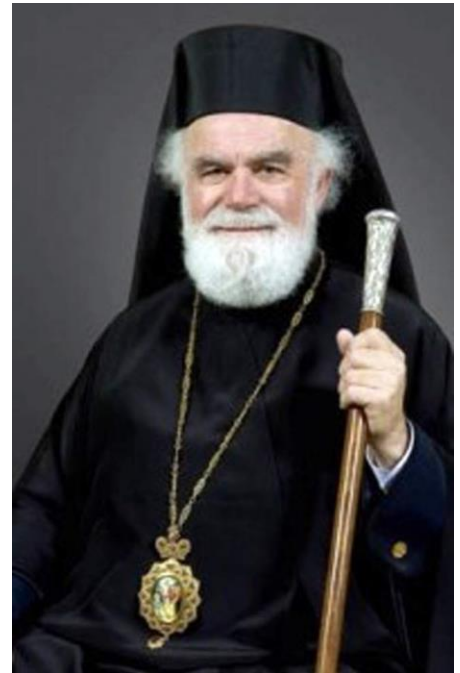
In this example, we have something that has existed throughout the centuries: when something bad happens to us, we attempt to find a reason. "What have I done wrong?" "Who is responsible that that this has happened to me?" Many times, people blame God for allowing a misfortune to take place.

And so when our Disciples encounter the blind man (who, as we shall later see, is well known to the inhabitants of the town, for he goes from corner to corner asking for help), they ask their Teacher, "*Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?*" (John 9:2) According to our limited human understanding, this question would seem to be a crucial one, but our Lord answers, "*It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him*" (John 9:3).

The blind man has also proven himself to be able to take his pain and his disability, living his life in virtuous patience, without blaming anyone. Our Lord exhibits this very same patience in receiving our sins, not simply during His Crucifixion and Passion, but even in today's society, when we fail to recognize and live by His Word.

In society, we also have a tendency to cry out at every perceived injustice, every pressure, and every sickness. While medicine is gift from God, I find that our willingness to try to find an instant cure for every pain creates a side effect: we lack true patience. In my younger years, I had the honor of discussing these things with the Spiritual Fathers of my monastery, who suggested that the growth of Psychopharmacology in fact lessened our ability to cope. In the old days, people could share their pains and difficulties with their Confessor—psychological and otherwise—and through prayer and repentance, they would feel unburdened. All these things are obstacles toward which we must show more patience. With patience, our faith becomes stronger, and when our faith is stronger, pain lessens. In nature, after the terrible storm, the weather is again beautiful.

Our ever-patient Lord, seeing the like patience of the blind man is moved. He wants the man to see the beauty of this universe our God has created. Taking His spittle and



making clay from dust, Jesus anoints the man's eyes and tells him to go and wash in the pool of Siloam, to demonstrate the miracle to the people. St. John Chrysostom naturally draws the comparison that, just as God created Adam and Eve from His Divine breath and the dust of earth, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity gives sight and new life to the blind man in the same way.

The Grace of our Lord is surely responsible for the healing of the Blind Man, but equally as necessary is the synergy of the man himself, for all human beings have free will. God has power over all things, but we, of all His Creation, are unique: He wants us to choose to work together with Him.

After the miracle, the blind man's problems are far from ended. On one side, his neighbors do not believe that this is the same man born blind. On the other side, the Pharisees and authorities wish to interrogate the man, and to use his own words against Christ, whom they hate. However, the man still shows his characteristic patience, defending the ministry of Jesus as coming from God.

Though the man is cast out from the synagogue, Jesus approaches him, asking, *"Do you believe in the Son of man?"* He answered, *"And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?"* Jesus said to him, *"You have seen him, and it is he who speaks to you."* He said, *"Lord, I believe"; and he worshiped him. (John 9:35-38)* Indeed, it is a wonderful thing that this man is at peace, having been given His vision, and having met the Creator of all.

Like this man, we (and those in every century and era) have the opportunity to truly meet Jesus Christ, but it is up to us if we are to be personally connected with Him. This is what matters to God: if we are going to use the gift of our free will to remain separated from Him, or to live close to Him forever.

As we approach the Feast of the Ascension, this is the last weekly message where I shall convey that truly life-giving greeting, **Χριστός ἀνέστη!** *Christ is Risen! Truly He is Risen!*

+ALEXIOS

Metropolitan of Atlanta