

4<sup>th</sup> Sun. Lent (C) Cycle A Scriptures  
St. Athanasius and St. Francis Parishes  
March 5, 6, 2016

The source I go to frequently, as I've mentioned often with you, is John Shea. Writing about today's Gospel, he discusses St. John's incredible story of the man born blind as a story with 6 scenes. This is far too much to deal with in a Sunday homily. So, we will look at one of the scenes, the one that surprised me, even excited me, and gave me something to consider for a good while ... maybe it will you as well. In Shea's breakdown of the story, this is scene 2.

*"The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?"  
Some were saying, "It is he."  
Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him."  
He (the beggar himself) kept saying, "I am the man."*

Listen to his words again. "I am the man," and note especially the first two words he speaks, "I am." You've heard those words many times, and in some very important Scripture scenes and situations. The simple statement, "I am the man" is absolutely masterful. St. John is such an incredible evangelist. The two words, "I am" are essential Jesus words .... they are essential God words.

We first hear the two words "I am" way back in the Old Testament when Moses asks God for his name. Recall when Moses is asked by God to go to the Pharaoh and ask the Pharaoh to let the Israelite people leave Egypt. Moses realizes just how difficult and challenging, even impossible, this will be. So Moses says to God ....when I ask this, the Pharaoh is sure to ask me 'who sent you to me?' He will want to know your name. What shall I tell him?" God responds, "Tell him I AM sent you." From then on the name of God is simply I AM. And from then on those two simple words indicate divinity, and connection with God.

St. John uses these two words frequently in his gospel, and you know them well  
.... I am the resurrection and the life                      the vine and the branches  
                    the bread of life    the way, the truth, and the life  
                    the light of the world                                      the good shepherd

All of these phrases are essential God phrases for us because they are each preceded by the two simple words I AM. In today's story of the man born blind, the man uses these same two words to identify himself to the doubting crowd of Jewish leaders. "I AM the man", he says. Who cannot be overwhelmed by this?

The man who was blind knows that something marvelous has happened to him, even within him, and St. John immediately connects what has happened to the man with the power of God. I AM the man!

What does this mean? It tells us that the man born blind sees himself differently, He has a new consciousness about himself. He has a new and deeper self-awareness. The man born blind understands himself as having a share in the essential identity of Jesus. He has, of course, a long way to go in terms of being fully aware of what is happening to him and with him and around him. But, he makes an amazing connection that the restoration of his physical sight is far more than just physical. His physical sight is a sign of a new spiritual sight that is being given to him.

But that is really how spiritual things happen in our lives as well. No one of us wakes up some morning a totally transformed spiritual person. We **become** disciples, we **become** Christian, we **become** 'of God'. It takes much time for us to realize and understand what God is doing in us. But that first realization, like the blind beggar saying "I AM the man" is absolutely necessary to get us started. Eventually the blind beggar will progress through the story to the point where he knows that Jesus is not just sent from God but that Jesus is the very being and love of God present in the world. Scene 2 is like the first day of creation. Many more days of creation will follow. But having the blind beggar use the words "I AM" are amazing and significant.

This week spend some time thinking about today's gospel story.

Pray that Jesus becomes your priority. Pray that Jesus be not an appendage to your life, or an after-thought at the end of the day. Pray that Jesus be SOMEONE from within you, not SOMETHING external and imposed on you. Pray that Jesus be 'a want to' and not 'a have to' in your life.

As noted earlier, John has Jesus speak many "I AM" statements throughout his gospel. I AM the resurrection and the life, I AM the Bread of Life, I AM the good shepherd. Pray that we may learn to say in response, "Jesus you are my Resurrection and Life, you are my Bread of Life, you are my Good Shepherd. That would be real spiritual sight. May this happen soon.