

## “The blind man is the human race”

*Xing*

5-6 minutes



Detail from

[Reading:](#)

- 1 Sam 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a
- Psa 23:1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6
- Eph 5:8-14
- Jn 9:1-41

Scripture refers many times to the contrast between darkness and light. The first mention of this division is in the opening chapter of Genesis, in which God speaks light into being. “God saw how good the light was. God then separated the light from the darkness” (Gen 1:3). Light, of course, is essential for the existence of living things,

who rely upon it for everything from heat to energy to sight.

The opening of the Gospel of John intentionally echoes Genesis 1 in describing how the Word of God—Who created all things—came into the world in order to bring about a new creation. “What came to be through him was life,” the Apostle John wrote, “and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (Jn 1:3b-5). The intertwining themes of life and light, death and darkness, set the stage for many of the narratives and discourses in the Fourth Gospel, including today’s Gospel reading, which is the story of the man born blind.

At the heart of this fascinating narrative is a simple but powerful contrast: the man who is blind from birth knows little, but upon encountering the healing Savior learns much. The Pharisees, who present themselves as knowing everything of importance, expose themselves as men who can be taught nothing, even though they speak directly to Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word (cf. Jn 9:39). Part of the initial discussion is focused on the disciples’ question about who is to blame for the man’s blindness. Jesus’ response might seem flippant—indeed, *would* be flippant—if He weren’t God. But it also points out that the disciples, like the Pharisees, are more interested in assigning blame than in extending mercy and healing.

Saint Augustine, commenting on the spiritual sense or meaning of the man’s blindness, simply stated, “This blind man is the human race.” Although the man’s physical blindness was not due to his sin, all of mankind is stricken with spiritual blindness, passed on to us by our father Adam due to his prideful desire to find fulfillment apart from God. That act of rebellion resulted in man’s expulsion from the Garden, into the desert of a world deformed and darkened by sin. All of us, like the blind man, are unable to heal ourselves; desiring to see, we stumble about in darkness and misery.

Blindness in first-century Palestine meant being almost entirely cut off from the ordinary life of society. Analogously, spiritual blindness

consists of being separated from the life and grace of God—that divine “society” of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The key question for every man is simply this: Do you *really* want to see? The Evangelist, in depicting the various responses to Jesus’ word and actions, reveals the clear divisions created by Christ and that His words and deeds demand an honest response. Upon having spittle applied to eyes and being told to go wash in the pool of Siloam, the blind man obeys. But that is just the beginning of the miracle of sight, for he will soon recognize, through spiritual eyes, that the man called Jesus (Jn 9:11) is also a prophet (Jn. 9:17)—and not just any prophet, but one sent from God (Jn 9:33).

But the full splendor of spiritual light is shown forth when he says, “I do believe, Lord” and worships Jesus (Jn 9:38).

In talking to the Pharisees, the blind man used simple but unsettling logic: the man who healed him must be from God since only God can perform such a miracle. The Pharisees, in response, throw him out—most likely excommunicating him from the life of the Temple and synagogue. They would rather speak for Moses than listen to God; they preferred to slumber in sin than actually be saved. But those who desire to see and to live will heed the words of Saint Paul: “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.”

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