

March 2, 2008 – A – 7:30am

LESSON: Valuing God's Better Gifts

At first, Jesus' healing of the blind man seems to be just another story about Jesus healing someone. But, looking a little deeper, we can quickly see that this story is NOT just about retelling a miraculous cure of one person. Rather, the story has a much larger scope with implications for every one of us. John is not telling us that one man was born blind and Jesus cured him; St. John is reminding us that we are ALL born "blind from birth" and that we ALL are in need of Jesus' healing.



Jesus gave this blind man **two priceless gifts**? First, Jesus gave him the **joy of physical sight**.

- ✍ For the first time in his life he could **see**.
- ✍ All of the things that he had known just by words, sound, and touch suddenly came **alive**.
- ✍ **color** flooded his mind and **filled** him with **wonder**;
- ✍ his very first glance at the beauty of the sky and the landscape;
- ✍ the subtle beauty of **expressions** on people's faces emphasizing the meanings of their words;
- ✍ the **look of love** and tenderness from his **mother**, which he had **never** seen...

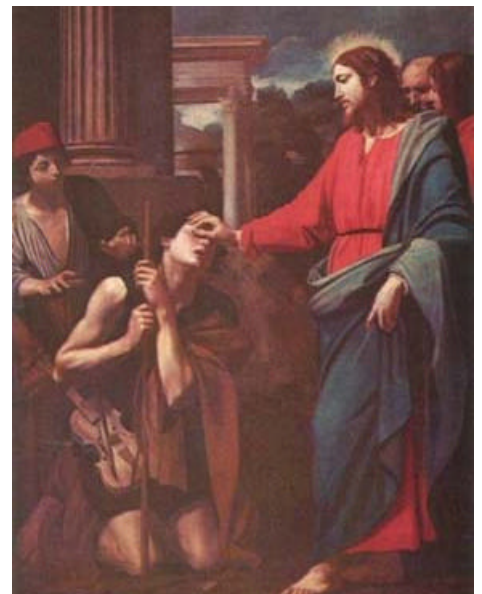
Jesus had **opened up** to this man a new and awe-inspiring world of human experience.

- ✍ Joy, amazement, and gratitude **filled** the man's mind and heart.
- ✍ He had now been opened up to an entirely new **intensity of life**.

As wonderful as this is, Jesus **also** gave him the gift of **spiritual sight** - the **gift of faith**.

- ✍ He enabled the blind man to **recognize and see God** in Jesus.
- ✍ He enabled him to encounter his **Creator** knowingly, **face to face**.
- ✍ And the man was **overwhelmed** with a sense of **gratitude and awe** - so much so that he fell down at Christ's feet and **worshipped** him, right there in the middle of the crowded Temple.

Which gift (physical sight or faith) did the man **value more**?



His **actions** give us the **answer**.



- ✍ He **stood up to** the powerful Pharisees, **defending Christ's lordship**, even at the risk of being **expelled** from the synagogue - making him into a **social outcast**.
- ✍ This man did not let the **gifts** of God **blind** him to the **goodness** of God.

We have **also** received **two priceless gifts** from God: our **natural lives**, with all that that entails, and our **supernatural** life, our knowledge of, faith in, and **friendship** with Christ. Which do we value more?

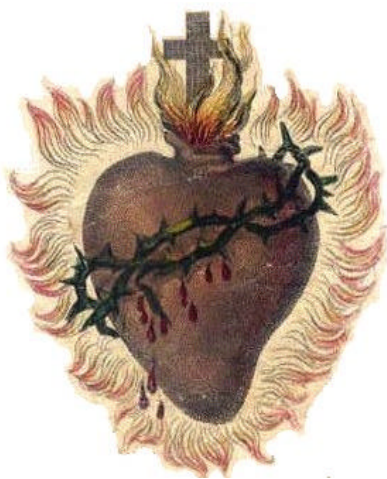
ILLUSTRATION: The Sacred Heart Is not Indifferent to Our Love

Sometimes it is **hard** for us to admit that we don't follow Christ as **closely** as we should. But we really need to be humble. Only the **truth** will set us free to live an abundant life. When we prefer the **lesser** gifts to the **greater** gifts, putting our faith in **second place**, it pains Christ and wounds our souls.

Jesus made this **especially clear** in his famous revelations to **St Margaret Mary Alacoque**, a French nun who furthered the devotion to the **Sacred Heart of Jesus** in the 1600s. This window gives a wonderful view of that revelation...



- ✍ While she was in prayer, our Lord appeared to her, with his **five wounds** shining like five brilliant suns and his **Sacred Heart** burning like a furnace of fire.



- ✍ He told her how much he **loves** every single man, woman, and child, and how deeply he feels the ingratitude they show him by **rejecting** or **belittling** his friendship.
- ✍ He appeared to her **two more times**.
- ✍ On the last time, he showed his heart on a **throne of flames**, wrapped tightly with a **crown of thorns**, and topped with a **cross**.
- ✍ He told her, "Behold this heart that has loved men so much that it has **spared nothing** to testify to them its love. And in return I receive from most of them only **ingratitude** by their **irreverence** and their **sacrileges** and by the **coldness** and **contempt** they have for me in the sacrament of love."

- ✍ He then explained to her that he was speaking not only of **great criminals** and **violent sinners**, but most especially of those who **claimed** to be his followers but who had fallen into **routine** and **empty ritualism**.

It sounds harsh, but it is only because his love is so **deep** that our ingratitude is so **painful** to him. His love, his friendship, our faith, the sacraments - **these** are the gifts we should **value most**.

APPLICATION: Taking Advantage of Confession

It's **hard** for us to keep our priorities straight. The pleasures of our **natural** life can be so **vivid** that we let them **upstage** our **supernatural** life.

- ✍ We want to be **popular**, so we join in with the **gossiping** or the **vulgar**, locker-room talk.
- ✍ We want to be **successful**, so we condone the **dishonesty and deception** being used by everyone else to **climb the ladder**.
- ✍ We want to **enjoy** ourselves, so we make **excuses** when our **conscience** reminds us that there is **more** to life than just having a good time.

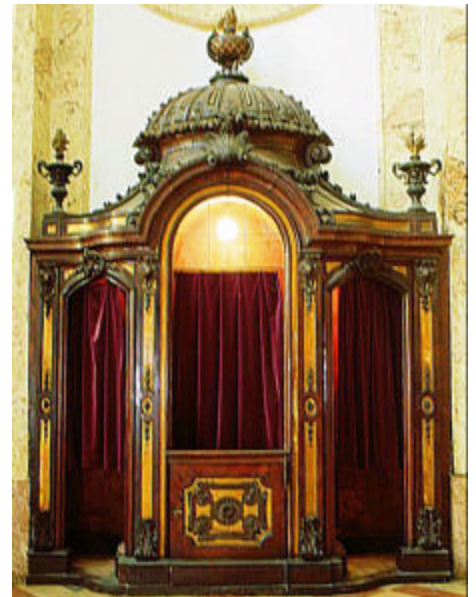
All of us here today are making an effort to **follow Christ**, to keep our priorities **right**, and yet, we still have our **falls and failures** – we sin.

It is for this reason that the Church **requires** us to go to confession once a year if we have a **mortal sin** on our conscience.

But the Church **recommends** that we go **much more frequently** - every month, every fifteen days, even every week, as the Pope does.

Today we have been **reminded** of one of the **reasons** behind this command and this recommendation.

- ✍ Christ doesn't want us to experience his forgiveness **vaguely**, from a **distance**.
- ✍ He knows we **need more than that**.
- ✍ He knows that the **fullness of joy** that comes from a healthy friendship with him requires a **real, tangible** experience of confession and forgiveness.
- ✍ This is why confession is sometimes referred to as the **sacrament of regained joy**.
- ✍ If any of us here today have not yet been to confession this Lent, **now** is the time to go.
- ✍ Next Sunday we will have several priests here for our Penance Service – giving all of us the opportunity to be healed of our blindness – to “untwist” the devils distortions of



reality, and to see clearly. I STRONGLY encourage everyone to take advantage of these other priests coming to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation with us – because all the other scheduled times it's just me. On the Saturday before Christmas I was OVERWHELMED with confessions – more than I could possibly hear before 4pm Mass – so I ask you to come to confession next Sunday evening when we have several priests here.

Today we are wearing **rose-colored vestments**, because today, the Fourth Sunday of Lent, is "Laetare Sunday", the **Sunday of rejoicing**.



- ☞ Lent is a season of penance and repentance, but Christian penance doesn't end in **sadness** – but in rejoicing in God's **great** love and mercy.
- ☞ It ends in a **closer communion with God**, the source of meaning and wisdom.
- ☞ Jesus suffered on the cross, taking upon himself the punishment due to our sins, precisely **so that** we could find in him a **fresh start, ready help, and unconditional forgiveness**.

Today he will renew his **commitment** to us through this Mass and Holy Communion.

When he does, let's give him the pleasure of **letting him be our Good Shepherd**, of letting him **heal and renew** our souls through **real, sacramental contact** with us, by **promising** him that we will take advantage of the **great sacrament of confession**.

Just like the man born blind, how we deal with things reveals what we hold as most important in our lives. So, what **do** we hold as most important? Our Faith? Or our sin?