

Homily for Ordinary Time XXX, 2018

The Blind Man and the Bomb Maker

We just lived through a week of pipe-bombs by mail. Buried under that story was the murder of two people this past Wednesday at a Kentucky supermarket by a racist shooter. And while I was writing this came news of anti-Semitic mass-killing at a Pittsburgh synagogue service. There's a lesson here connected to today's Gospel and to Jesus' teaching as a whole.

Blindness and seeing is a metaphor that runs through the Gospel – remember John's story of the "Man Born Blind," and even Jesus' condemnation of Saint Peter at one point: "You are seeing as human beings see, not as God sees." Blindness in the Gospel is a matter of "not getting the point" – the point of *what God is doing in Jesus* and how to respond to that.

The key line in today's story is not, "Immediately [the blind man] received his sight"; it's "he followed [Jesus] on the way." Once the man sees, becoming a disciple is the next step.

We have to remember that, as important as care for suffering individuals was, the heart of Jesus' mission was to start the peaceful revolution – God was about to re-assume His rightful role as true ruler of the universe which had revolted against Him through sin. "I have come to light a fire on the earth" – "the Kingdom of God is at hand": This is the core of Jesus' message, with the New Creation and eternal life as the result of God's becoming the righteous King.

The once-blind man following Jesus was expected to learn that – not just as a set of ideas, but as a new way to live. Jesus had "opened his eyes" not to the world as the passers-by on the street saw it, but as Jesus would teach him: as a world being set back right-side-up, ultimately through Jesus' cross and resurrection. The once-blind man had to learn to live as if God were already king, a citizen of a society that was only beginning to come into being. That's what discipleship is about – being a citizen of God's new society, even as it comes to birth.

And that's where we turn again to the bombs and the shootings. It's clear that the bomber and the shooters had motives that were, however deranged, in the widest sense political and/or racial: in a synagogue at worship; white shooter and black supermarket victims; bombs sent to prominent members of one political party. They were *against* some group. The division of people into groups, some imagined as virtuous and the other as evil-because-"other," is a work of what the Gospel would call "the Prince of this age" – the cosmic power of evil, the Satan, that Jesus had come to drive out. It's the old, sinful, and now dying, way of doing things.

This is what the once-blind man's eyes had to be opened to: The true God is a God who, in Jesus' words, makes the sun rise on the good and the evil, the rain fall on the just and the unjust. It is not the work of human beings to judge who is, and is not, worthy – that belongs to the coming true King. In God's new society, there is no "them."

In very practical terms, to be an open-eyed disciple in today's America requires that we look clearly at where divisions are being fostered, by politicians and media figures and anyone else. The violence that divisive language triggers in deranged individuals is tragic: but it is not the root of the evil; language only gives permission for it. The heart of the evil is the blindness that fails to see fostering division as the work of the Evil One – and language that encourages suspicion and hatred, which has become far too common, as quite literally demonic.

The way of Jesus is nonviolent resistance – never to persons, always to the evil that the “Father of Lies” does. Discipleship, at this moment, requires a constant prayer “Lord, that I may see” from every believer – so we do not encourage, or even unwittingly cooperate in, the devil’s work of division by approving or even tolerating such language.

The new world the once-blind man came to see as he “followed [Jesus] down the road” is what we too look forward to – and look around to see the signs of. The blood-banks in Pittsburgh were full of people donating last night after the synagogue shooting. Thousands of people gathered at vigils to mourn the wounded and the dead. The police, FBI, and emergency services have done their jobs through this past week’s craziness. And we can trust that the Holy Spirit is continuing to open the eyes of those who wish to see a path out of violence and hatred, and into the light of God.