

Fourth Sunday of Lent

Parents receive both credit and blame for the actions of their kids. If children excel at school, in sports, or in the arts, some people say, "They had good genes." If kids turn to drugs and violence, some people say, "It's their parents' fault." Parents naturally feel responsible for their kids. Usually, children do absorb the values their parents share, but every child is ultimately responsible for the decisions he or she makes. To some extent, every parent deserves credit and blame for their children, and to some extent they do not.

The parents of the man born blind appear in this gospel narrative twice. At the beginning, the disciples see a man blind from birth, and they make false presumptions. They think any illness like this has to come from sin. A man born blind could not have committed any sin before his birth, so they wonder if his parents were the sinners. Jesus dismisses these suggestions. First, he sees no connection between sin and disease. This is still a helpful teaching to hear. Even today, sick people who know better still may say in their prayer something like, "Lord, what did I do to deserve this?" The illness feels like a punishment, even though we know it is not. Of course, there are times when sinful behavior does lead to illness - people who drink too much, abuse drugs, eat unhealthy foods, or never exercise, for example, are responsible for whatever illness befalls them. In general, however, sickness just happens. Jesus then explains that this particular blindness has another purpose - not to manifest anyone's sin, but to show the glory of God through healing.

The second time the parents appear in this story they are being questioned. The authorities doubt that the man was born blind at all, and they suspect that the parents were part of an elaborate ruse. At the beginning, the parents are blamed for the man's blindness; later they are blamed for his sight. They are worried about this accusation, so they tell the authorities to talk to their son instead. Parents are not responsible for everything their children do.

Each of us in some sense is blind from birth. We cannot always see solutions to problems, positive ways to relate to others, or the demands of faith. We have to gain sight into these matters. During the season of Lent, we pray that our eyes will be opened. Sometimes the blindness we have is no one's fault. We were simply born without some opportunities. No one should take credit or blame. Other times, though, we have not opened our eyes at the invitation of our parents, our friends, our enemies, or Christ. Our resistance to change, our lack of charity, our selfishness is like clay covering our eyes. Lent is trying to wash us clean, so that we can be forgiven and see the mercy of God.