

**Reflection on the Alternative Gospel Reading-4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent  
(John 9:1-41)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

Today's gospel story invites us on a faith journey with a man born blind and with the several other groups of participants in the drama. All have the opportunity of coming to faith. All do not, however, accept the invitation. Ironically, the blind come to see, both physically and spiritually, while those who are gifted with physical sight remain in spiritual darkness. In healing the man born blind, Jesus performs the sixth of eight powerful actions or "signs" in John's gospel that reveal God's power at work in Jesus and in the lives of those who seek life. The "signs" invite the reader/hearer/viewer to accept Jesus and his revelation of God and God's purposes.

Time features significantly in the story. Jesus heals the blind beggar on the sabbath. The Jerusalem authorities have already raised objections about Jesus' sabbath healing activity (John 5). Once again they object that he is failing to observe the Sabbath. They label him a sinner. Ironically, in the final authoritative analysis, it is they who "remain in their sins". This story reminds us of the need to check out our assumptions. It also reminds us to accept the fact that we can be wrong about things we have always believed. It invites us to be open to see differently or from a new and different perspective. Jesus' disciples, the parents of a man born blind, his neighbours and the religious authorities all operate out of unchecked assumptions. They mostly come to the wrong conclusions. Only those willing to admit that they have it wrong have any chance of coming to faith.

In the common estimation, if the man was blind, then he or his parents must have sinned. Not so, according to Jesus. From the perspective of the authorities, Jesus heals on the Sabbath and is therefore a sinner. Not so, from Jesus' point of view. The man was born blind, so needs others to speak for him. Not so, say his parents, he can speak for himself. He does speak for himself and quite eloquently, to the chagrin of the religious authorities. He presents them with the truth about Jesus but they refuse to accept the word of an outcast. Their reaction is violent: they drive him out. But Jesus goes in search of him and leads him to yet deeper levels of faith and understanding.

This gospel reading offers us an invitation to look at our own blindness to the plight of the whole Earth Community. I find it helpful to read the story more than once and to put myself in the place of the different characters. There is a little bit of each character in me and in every one of us. We too must be open to embracing deeper levels of faith and understanding.