

Homily For The Sixth Sunday of Pascha The Blind Man
May 17, 2015

In The Name of The Father and of The Son and of The Holy Spirit. Amen.

Christ is Risen! Christos Voskres! Christos Anesti!

It is hard to believe that today is the last Sunday we celebrate the Paschal Divine Liturgy this Season as Thursday of this coming week is Ascension! The expression “time flies when you are having fun” certainly comes to mind. And Pascha is just that, or as we say at Camp Nazareth it is “fun in Christ” Pascha reminds us joy is an important component of the “Life in Christ.” Joy, is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. A gift that we need to cultivate in our daily lives if we are truly to be alive in Christ.

Today, on this sixth Sunday of Pascha, we call to mind an incredibly joyful day in the life of a poor unfortunate man who was blind from birth. A day in which everything changed for him for the better. One minute he was walking in darkness, and the next, thanks to the mercy of God, he was engulfed in the Light of Christ! It is hard for us to imagine, what it was like for this man, who knew only darkness, to see for the first time color, and to take in the beauty of God’s creation. And I am sure, he was overwhelmed by everything he saw, even the small, in significant things that you and I take for granted and no longer notice.

Today, in setting this wonderful miracle before us, the Church is trying to teach you and I a few Very important things, as we take leave of Pascha and await the Descent of the Holy Spirit on The Feast of Pentecost.

In the person of the Blind Man, we see someone who has suffered much, who has struggled with a limiting physical disability. It is hard for us to imagine how difficult it had to have been for this man to survive, especially in the time in which he lived. There were no talking books, there were no brail books, there were no seeing eye dogs. He was totally reliant on others. Imagine the pain his parents felt, and how restricted their lives were. Imagine the worry and

Concern they must have had over what would happen to their son when they died.

There are many today, who suffer from physical handicaps and other ailments. Some from the time of birth and others later in life. It is so hard to see good people, those who are Godly people suffer and especially children. This week, during hospital visitations, my heart ached when I saw two young children, under ten years of age, and a 20 something young man, leaving the chemotherapy treatment area. Just seeing them reminded me how blessed I am to have my health. When I momentarily wavered, and questioned in my heart how it was possible that God would allow these young people to be so sick, immediately, my thoughts turned to the Words of our Saviour in this morning's Gospel reading. "neither this man nor his Parents sinned – this sickness was allowed so that the Glory of God might be witnessed."

This is a very tough lesson for us to learn today. We know that sickness and suffering and pain were not part of God's original plan for his creation. We know this came about by Adam and Eve's disobedience. We also know that this grieved God, who only wants all of His creation to be saved and, happy and at peace. He chose not to completely erase the sin of Adam and Eve and allow them a do-over, because by doing so, he would destroy free-will, which would in effect prevent us from being able to experience love. So we struggle with sin, each and every day and live with the consequences of sin and evil being in the world. Our own sicknesses and illnesses, are a result of both the general state of sin and corruption, and the sinful actions of others, and by our own sinfulness.

For example, someone may be severely injured or permanently handicapped in a car crash caused by a drunk driver. Or someone may develop lung cancer after smoking heavily for years. The first instance, is not at all the fault of the person who is injured, and in the second, it is entirely the result of that person's actions.

In either case, the person who is suffering might wonder, why is God punishing me. In the first instance, and in the case of the blind man, it is not their fault at all and God is not

punishing them. In the second case, the person is experiencing the consequences of their actions. Is God then, punishing that person? Well it depends on how you define punishment. Why does a good parent punish their child? They do so not to hurt their child, because they love him or her. They do so to help them to learn, to correct behavior that if left unchecked could be disastrous for them. So yes sometimes God allows something to happen to us, to get our attention, to help us. In that sense, an illness or cross or unpleasant situation can be given to us for that purpose.

However, getting back to the point I was making earlier, many times, our illnesses or problems, or crosses, are given to us to show the Glory and power of God. If we were not so spiritually blind, and in a sense we all are, we would be able to see how interconnected we are with other people. We would see how we really are the Body of Christ, that you and I and our lives are intimately tied together. Over the course of a single day, the average person comes in contact, even if only for a second with many, people, even if only it is a passing glance as we pass by someone in the car, or people in the grocery store, or the shopping mall or wherever or even for that matter in our interactions on Social Media. A single post on Facebook or an Instagram or a Tweet may be seen by hundreds or in some cases thousands of people.

Therefore, can you not see, that one single life, can impact another in a profound way, both positive and negative. Regarding sickness, I have been profoundly affected in a positive way by each and every one of you. Some aspect of each of your lives has been an inspiration to me – your life story, the experiences and challenges you have faced and how your faith has sustained you. I have seen such Grace and Courage in the gravely ill, I remember many times coming to minister to the dying only to have them minister to me, to change the conversation back to me, asking about my family, how I was doing... I have witnessed the power of God, when administering the Sacraments to the sick, the power of spiritual healing. As in the case of the blind man the majority of those who are suffering and ill, are not being punished or chastised by God. The longer I serve as a priest, the more I am convinced that God chooses special people to carry the Cross of Illness and Suffering, for a reason, to provide living icons

of His Son, Our Lord Jesus the Long Suffering, King of Glory. Being a living icon means, that the person who is undergoing pain and suffering, with Faith and Grace and Love, serves as a reminder of God's Love, who voluntarily underwent similar and more intense pain. When I see someone in pain, pray more intensely, and demonstrate great love and kindness, I am reminded of the power of faith, and I am strengthened in my own faith. I feel the presence of God in a very powerful way.

Imagine the impact such a person could have upon, even a random person in their life, the janitor who cleans this person's room in the hospital, or even the Doctors, who often have been dumfounded by a miraculous recovery. Or something more simple. This week I was so proud of one of my spiritual children who just by wearing his Tribar Cross prominently around his neck while in the hospital, had the opportunity to give testimony to the Orthodox Faith to a Jewish Doctor, who insisted that he explain its significance.

I remember once someone I visited in the hospital saying something very profound to me. This person, who was very, very sick, said, "Father, I never asked God Why me, because when I thought about it why not me.... Christ didn't have it too easy, so why should I be any different.

So today, my friends, is a day of joy for us, another opportunity, the last for most of us to celebrate the Paschal Divine Liturgy and sing Christ is Risen. Today we rejoice with the Blind Man, who was miraculously healed. Today, I pray that we, too see the world with new eyes, filled with the light of Christ. that we have a different vision, a new way of looking at life, especially when we struggle with our crosses in life, as we suffer from sickness, pain and heartache. If we look at our life situation through the eyes of faith, we can see even in the most terrible of situations, the Glory of God, we can see Christ near to us, keeping us company as we watch and pray, giving peace to our minds and hearts, giving us the strength to endure our suffering. May it help us to remember that sickness, although not a part of God's plan can help us and those with whom we come in contact with, to help us to focus on that which is the most

needful in our lives, the Kingdom of Heaven.

Let us keep our eyes firmly focused on the light of Christ, so that we may overcome the darkness of sin and evil and sickness and death, and enter into the joy of the never ending day of the Kingdom.

Christ is Risen!!!!!!