

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

## Anointed and Washed

Who is the man born blind? I'd like to own up myself, and invite you to do the same. "Were you born a Catholic?" people ask. Certainly not; it isn't one of the things you inherit genetically. We are *all* converts to the faith: some of us are baptised before others, but that's all one. And we can all identify with the blind man in the Gospel, who is so silent until he is given his sight.

### Ignorance Under Siege

There's a lot of *ignorance* in today's Gospel. The disciples ask for a link between disability and sin, and Jesus says there isn't one – the link is between disability and *glory* (the display of God's work). Then there's dispute about the identity of the enlightened man (could a man now filled with light once have been blind?) and then there are questions about how he came to see; but when he is asked *where is Jesus?* even the receiver of the miracle says: *I don't know.*

### Enter The Pharisees

Something about the way the man is brought before the Pharisees immediately evokes the Jewish trial of Jesus: an atmosphere of inquisition expressed in a readiness to condemn. Again the question of evil comes up, this time about Jesus: *He does not keep the Sabbath*, some say; but others ask: *Could a sinner produce signs like this?* They return to Exhibit A, the blind man: by now he has made inroads on his former ignorance, and developed: he now says: *He is a prophet.*

### More ignorance – it's safer not to know

At this point the parents of the man are dragged in, terrified to be put on the spot. They will only accept a little competence: "*We know* he is our son, and *we know* he was born blind; but any more than that, *we don't know.* Ask him - he's old enough!" Not a very creditable show of responsibility, but they are afraid to commit themselves, and are, alas, destined to remain in the "safety" of the dark, the home of the fearful.

### The Darkness And The Light

So the Pharisees (who at this point have suddenly become *the Jews* - as if the fate of the whole people is involved in the case) send for the man and declare a verdict against Jesus, the Sabbath-breaker: *we know he is a sinner.* The man is now incensed, feeling that his new sight is being somehow being ignored, even criticised. He

professes ignorance one more time: *I don't know if he is a sinner:* but now he professes knowledge: *I only know that I was blind, and now I can see.* The gathering has become heated by now, and the man cries out, *Do you want to be his disciples?* It is the ultimate question, by which, John tells us, we will finally be judged, the life and death issue. *Anyone who believes in him will not be condemned. Whoever refuses to believe is condemned already.* The authorities stay firmly on the fence: *we are disciples of Moses, because we know that God spoke to Moses; for this man, we don't know where he comes from.* By now, the man's mind is made up. *If he did not come from God, he could do nothing.* This seals his (Jewish) fate: he is himself denounced as a sinner *through and through, since you were born -* the implication being, *since you were born blind.* He is excommunicated, a lost sheep, an outcast. It is then that Jesus comes to search for him, and puts to him the same vital question the Pharisees would not answer: *Do you believe in the Son of Man?* His reply is his last avowal of ignorance: *Sir, tell me who he is, so that I may believe.* Jesus says: *You can see him, he speaks to you.* His response takes him wholly into the Church: "the man said, *Lord, I believe,* and worshipped him".

### Jesus Christ, The Daystar

If we are really this blind man, we must follow his footsteps carefully. Like him, we have been anointed with the truth, not with a lie, and washed in the waters of rebirth. We have felt the resistance of our nature, and the opposition of the world, to the message of the truth. But we have also understood the light we have received as "coming from God", and have learnt to search for "the prophet" who has opened our eyes. If we have truly caught the light, and been transfigured by it (as Paul says, *anything illuminated turns into light*) then we can expect the Lord to seek us out, and ask for our faith. It may not be a peaceful or gracious moment. But when he finds us, having already given us the eyes to see him, we will give him our worship. *Fr Philip*