

Text: John 9:1-41
Fourth Sunday of Lent, Cycle A
26 March 2017
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I have here a jar of dirt from my garden. Dirt has many uses. I'm growing garlic in this dirt. The Bible story says God made the first man, Adam from dirt. We heard that story on the First Sunday of Lent - and also heard on that Sunday that, when the power of evil became too much for Adam - made from dirt - to resist, Jesus came to the fight as Adam's champion to beat down and defeat the devil. Today, on the Fourth Sunday of Lent, dirt is part of the story. Jesus takes dirt, spits into it, makes clay, smears that clay on the blind man's eyes, tells the blind man to wash off the clay with the water of the Pool of Siloam - and the blind man now sees. He is a new man. In the Bible story of creation, God makes Adam, the first man, on the sixth day of creation, and then God rests on the seventh day, the Sabbath day. In today's Gospel, Jesus takes dirt and makes the blind man a new man on the Sabbath day, the seventh day of creation. God uses dirt on the sixth day of creation to create humanity. Jesus uses dirt on the Sabbath, the seventh day of creation, to begin the new creation of men and women in him - new life for us through Jesus, the Son of God. Jesus completes the giving of sight to the blind man by sending him to wash in the waters of the Pool of Siloam and not some other pool of water, because Siloam means "Sent" (as St John points out in the story): Jesus' way of signaling us that the Father *has sent* Jesus into the world to begin the new creation.

In between the First Sunday of Lent, when we hear the story of God first making man and woman, and today, the Fourth Sunday of Lent, when we hear the Good News of Jesus making new men and women through his power, we heard on the Second Sunday of Lent the story of the Transfiguration of Jesus in glory on the mountaintop, to show us what our eternal destiny is, and last week on the Third Sunday of Lent we heard the story of Jesus offering the woman at the well the water of a new life in him - the water of new life Jesus offers us too. Next week, we'll hear the story of Jesus raising his friend Lazarus from the dead. The Church gives us these stories at Mass in this order, for us to celebrate the trajectory - the direction - of God's plan of salvation for us, from the defeat of Adam and Eve at the hands of Satan in the Garden of Eden to Jesus' victory over death for us in the new creation, by raising Lazarus from death. And in two of the stories -

last Sunday's story of the Jesus offering the water of everlasting life to the woman at the well, and today's story of Jesus sending the blind man to wash in the waters of the Pool of Siloam – *water* is at the center of the story, because our new life in Jesus begins with the water poured over us at our Baptism and the Holy Spirit washing away our old lives with that water and making us be born again as a new man or a new woman. All of Lent we are headed towards Easter Sunday, when those who are not baptized will be baptized, and we who are baptized will make the Renewal of Baptismal Promises and celebrate Jesus' new creation in us, his new men and women.

When Jesus spits into dirt and makes mud, to make the blind man a new man, the only thing the Pharisees – the religious leaders – can see is that Jesus has done this on the seventh day, the Sabbath day, when a faithful Jew observes God's commandment not to work: and making mud is work. Therefore, the Pharisees conclude, Jesus cannot be sent from God. Their vision is so *closed* to what God is doing in Jesus, *they* are the blind ones. In the same way, on Palm Sunday, we'll hear the people shout to Jesus, "Hosanna to the Son of David" as Jesus rides into Jerusalem, celebrating Jesus as a new King David, the greatest king of Israel who almost didn't anointed king. Those shouts of celebration die away when Jesus is put to death on the cross. But during those hours on the cross, when Jesus looks like a failure, Jesus brings the world into new life, new creation. We Christians are God's new men and women, born again in Baptism, and we see how God is at work even in seeming failures and disasters. We know how the story ends, even now as we celebrate the story of new creation in Lent, moving through the stories of Lent to the climax of Good Friday and the victory of Easter. That is the Good News we have to share with a world that may be spiritually blind and not yet able to see.