

To have new sight is needed by us all. The blind man in today's gospel story (Jn. 9:1-41) has a healthy humility born, perhaps, of his need to rely on others and to tread carefully. He cannot then deny his new sight and how it has come about. He may not understand it but, but he knows what he saw or rather he knows *whom* he saw. The Pharisees in contrast live from a pre-determined mindset. It's not what they see that matters but what they think they see. Hilary Mantel's characterisation of Catholics in her latest novel, *The Mirror and the Light*, and, indeed, in all three books of the Cromwell trilogy, is just such a way of thinking. We can, of course, do the same with regard to the Pharisees – and Hilary Mantel! So how do we know that what we see is really true? When Samuel is led to choose a new king for Israel (1Sam.16:1-13) he is told

Take no notice of his appearance or his height for I have rejected him.

Ironically, the son he is led to choose is nonetheless one of *fresh complexion with fine eyes and pleasant bearing*, perhaps to emphasise that this is not therefore about choosing someone of unpleasant appearance or small stature as necessarily the more worthy candidate. No, there is away of seeing that goes beyond this . Professor David Ford writes at some length on 'Christian Wisdom', and makes the point that this wisdom is entirely a matter of gift, a time of waiting for the Holy Spirit to lead us into truth:

All the preparation, epistemological transformation, understanding of scripture, fellowship with Jesus and each other, and joyful worship do not amount to a process of development towards the receiving of the Spirit. it remains a complete gift.

(p. 64 *Christian Wisdom*)

The Pharisees are, indeed, well-learned in Scripture, as is Hilary Mantel in history, but the Pharisees are blind to the possibility that blindness may not be the result of sin, after all, or that good can be done on the Sabbath, as Hilary Mantel is blind to the possibility that the Catholics of Cromwell's time may not have deserved to be denigrated and persecuted because of their personal and institutional failings. No, their minds are made up and whatever the blind man now tells them will be rejected as the witness of an ignorant fool or, in Hilary Mantel's terminology, a *numbskull*, 'Hob or Hick'. As David Ford goes on to say.

*It is not that preparation is useless or inappropriate: there's a wisdom of preparation, and the 'foolish' disciples need to learn it. It is rather that interpretation of Scripture in the Spirit recognises that its most most essential wisdom is in constantly crying : Come Holy Spirit! (p.14 *ibid.*)*

We don't yet hear the 'blind' man cry out for further healing but this will come if his process of conversion is genuine. As it will for us too as we 'cry out' in desperate times. To have new sight is needed by us all.

Readings: 1 Sam.16:1,6-7,10:13
Ps.22 *The Lord is my Shepherd*
Ephesians 5:8-14
Jn.9:1-41

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