

## Jesus cures a man born blind

Until I was eleven years old I had never seen a major league baseball game. There was no television back then and all we could do was listen to games broadcast over the radio. With my ear to the speaker I could hear the chatter of the crowd punctuated by distant cheers. I could hear the crack of the bat, the call of the vendors, the voice of the broadcaster whose descriptions helped me imagine what was going on. Sometimes when the game was played in another city all I heard was the voice of the sportscaster and the click-click-click of a telegraph receiver - leaving me even deaf to the action. Then one day my mother took me to an American League home game and as I stepped out onto the third tier of Philadelphia's Shibe Park grandstand, I finally experienced the real thing. I saw what until then I had only heard. There was the manicured green outfield, the precisely outlined infield, the banners of previous championships, people in summer outfits, the distant bleachers loud with catcalls. And then there were the visiting Boston Red Sox and Jimmy Foxx and Jim Tabor in the flesh. And of course there were the A's with their gothic blue A prominent upon the left of their white flannel shirts. And there were the fly balls so gracefully caught by the outfielders and rocket like grounders so casually picked up by the infielders and whipped around the bases; and hot dogs and Cracker Jack. I was seeing all this for the first time in my life and so silently (with awe) that my mother thought I was unimpressed.

All of which makes me wonder how awed that man born blind in John's Gospel must have felt when Jesus restored his sight. To pass from hearing to actually viewing a live major league ball game is exciting enough but I had prior knowledge of what a ball and bat and glove looked like. But a man born blind who has never seen a tree or water or the sky or blue or red or green! What must that have been like - to see the world around him for the first time? To see human faces! And to behold the brilliance of the sun, the shapes and color of trees! What a shock; frightening as much as fascinating! And so you can understand how the issues obsessing his inquisitors, the Pharisees, seemed so irrelevant to him. They of course had long ago forgotten the wonder of God's creation about them, preoccupied as they were with rabbinical abstractions: who's right and who's wrong. They had become blind to all that now left this young man agog.

They ask him, "What have you to say about this Jesus?" He doesn't reply. He's too distracted by a window box of cascading geraniums and a cart of apples passing by. And how could he pay attention to their questions, being so mesmerized by the very faces of his inquisitors, the lines, expressions, lips, the color of their eyes, the colors of their tunics and turbans? "Are their eyes what you call blue or brown?" And when they engage his parents as witnesses, can't you imagine him transcending the purpose of the inquiry and exclaiming, "My mother, my father? So this is what you look like; let me take in your features, caress your cheeks. And all this talk about Jesus being a sinner? At a time like this I couldn't care less how you fellows classify people as good or bad, ugly or fair; he certainly looked wonderful to me!"

The Gospel of John, by way of this episode, challenges us to *ponder in depth* what it means to see after being so "blind" our whole life long, deluged by the fleeting

images of the media, images that last a split second and are gone – incohesively – a blur. John's episode displays in a dramatic way how radical a change Christ would effect in each of us – to see the world afresh instead of abstractly, impersonally and judgmentally.