

The Person Right in Front of Us

This weekly bulletin insert complements the curriculum published by the Department of Christian Education of the Orthodox Church in America. This and many other Christian Education resources are available at <http://dce.oca.org>.



June 9 this year is the Sunday of the Blind Man.

We read the story of this encounter of Jesus Christ with a man born blind in John 9: 1-38. In the verses immediately preceding this story, He has told hostile questioners that He is "before Abraham" and claims the divine name, "I am." There is no longer any possibility of misunderstanding what He is saying; Jesus is declaring Himself to be the Son of God.

Having done this, He turns His full attention to one person—the man blind from birth. He is going to do a miracle, and because He has just said so unequivocally that He is the Divine Son, we might expect that He will draw down lightning bolts or do something equally dazzling.

But instead He shows Himself as Man, caring for the man who stands in front of Him. He doesn't do anything spectacular, but uses the most basic elements of the earth to do the miracle: "...He spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle and anointed the man's eyes with the clay..."

He tells the man to do a basic thing, too—to wash off the clay in the pool of Siloam. By this simple, earthly act the man is healed and becomes able to see.

The other reading for this day is Acts 16: 16-34. These verses describe two instances in which Saint Paul follows Christ's example, being concerned for the person in front of him. The first encounter is with a slave girl who has "a spirit of divination" and makes money for her owners by

foretelling events. Paul risks his own safety, and drives the spirit out of her in the name of Jesus Christ.

Sure enough, the owners are furious at having lost their income. They drag Paul and his companion Silas into the market place and accuse them of disturbing the city and advocating Jewish customs that are against Roman law. The magistrates and the crowd beat them with rods, and they are dragged off to prison, where their confinement is assured by their feet being fastened in the stocks.

For the second time, Paul extends concern. He does so to a person who is neither his companion nor a fellow prisoner, but who has been put in front of him. When an earthquake shakes the prison, all the prisoners' shackles are unfastened. The jailer is panicked, terrified and fully aware that he will be held responsible when all the prisoners escape. As he is about to kill himself, Paul calls out to him, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here."

Troparion - Tone 4

I come to You, O Christ,
Blind from birth in my spiritual eyes
And I call to You in repentance:
You are the most radiant light of those in darkness!

This unexpected concern makes the jailer realize what kind of person Paul is, and he comes to believe in the God to whom Paul is so dedicated. He and his household are baptized that same night. They offer the former prisoners hospitality in their home, and everyone rejoices. They are truly in front of each other, and together in front of God.