



Post Communion Reflection Sunday 15th March. 2016

Allow me to introduce myself: I am Peter Flint, a Christian Brother, recently from Tasmania, and now living in the Mt Sion Hostel in Parkville. I have been invited to offer a reflection on today's Gospel.

I asked myself the question: "Is there anything in my life that parallels the blind man's experience. And upon reflection I think there is. Let me share it with you.

I grew up in a not very religious family. My father was a good man of establishment Anglican faith but not a church goer. My mother grew up in the minefields of Western Tasmania where the churches were few, and men of religion were scanty. My sister and I received all our education in Catholic schools and Colleges. The result was that I received a very traditional religious education, long before Vatican 11. As a 17yr old I joined the Christian brothers. There is a story there, but not for now.

Most, but not all, the brothers of those times had very traditional beliefs – myself among them. I was blind to what could be. I was a good brother, I hope, faithful to my Rule of life, and growing in reflectiveness. Some time later I even gained qualifications as a (Small) Ship's Master – therein another story.

Brothers were encouraged to keep studying and after Vatican 11. We were offered many opportunities for 'upgrading' our religious knowledge and to become aware of what the church of the times was asking. I accepted an invitation to attend a "Spirituality and Justice" course.

I suggest that acceptance was akin to the blind man of the Gospel allowing Jesus to put stuff on his eyes. During that Course, I was exposed to a book that opened my eyes to a Jesus I had never known - A Jesus with a passion for justice and mercy. I knew this in theory, but this book brought Jesus to life for me. My eyes were opened.

The Book was Ched Myers "*Binding the Strong Man – A Political Commentary of Mark's Gospel*". It revealed Jesus in the context of his society, his language, history, politics and customs of this time. It was an eye opener for myself – born blind - sort of. It has enriched my knowledge of Jesus, his times and his culture, more that anything else. My copy is well worn. (If perchance you come across it, start at Ch 4, leave the earlier parts till later.)

I have an interest in Fundamental physics: atoms, ions, quarks, Schrödinger's cat etc – a huge and ever growing body of knowledge, both in its extent and complexity. I also have an interest at the other end of that spectrum of knowledge – Cosmology. (I hope there are no well informed masters of these topics present, for I am but a beginning novice in these fields.)

– in many ways, another area where I am blind.

Ilija Delio's book: *"The Not Yet God, Carl Jung, Teilhard de Chardin and the Relational Whole"* has helped me towards forming a synthesis with fundamental Physics, Cosmology and my faith. I am not there yet, and may never get there, but hopefully I am on the journey. My eyes are being opened – further. This book is very heavy going – not for the theologically feint hearted. I am finding it invaluable. My experience of Christianity is being greatly enriched.

Finally, I have a passion for Church reform and have been quite passionate about Pope Francis' goals. I was a committee member of the 'Concerned Catholics of Tasmania.' A group, who for some reason, never got a Christmas card from the previous Archbishop. A different story now i am told, but that is for another time.

Again, my eyes were opened. This time by Tomas Halik's *"The Afternoon of Christianity – The Courage to Change."* One of my favourite quotes: "To succumb to nostalgia for an idealized past, for the morning of Christianity, is to be stuck in a too narrow (and often narrow minded,) form of Christianity and is a sign of immaturity." If perchance, you read this book, read the last paragraph first.

So the blind man of the Gospel, had to commence a new life – one where he needed to develop a level of independence from those who had cared and supported him in the past. He had to find a way to live in his new world without the level of assistance he had previously. He was also a dangerous challenge to the religious society of his times – he was a marked man and was an outcast. I suspect 'outcasts' lived short lives – as Jesus did..

As a Christian Brother, I feel somewhat of an 'outcast' in today's society. I am shy to introduce myself as Br Peter to those I do not know. But I know I must be involved with the poor and marginalized in today's world – as Jesus was. I have spent a lot of time in Prison. In Tasmania, I was, among other things, a Prison Inspector out of the Ombudsman's Prison Inspectorate Office. I currently have an application to be a Prison Chaplain here and have just received word that I have been accepted as a Support Worker in the Prison Ward of a big Hospital here.

My life has been enriched by my readings and reflections. There is risk, not safety, in living as a serious Christian. May I continue to read and continue to take risks – for the world and the Gospel.

Thank You.