

Reflecting with Jeanne Chézard de Matel: Fourth Sunday of Lent A
Autobiography 1 [232-234]

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The meditation on John's account of the healing of the man born blind is part of a longer passage in the *Autobiography*, wherein Jeanne expresses her overwhelming feelings of being graced by God and at the same time facing the opposition of humans. She prefers to rely on God rather than dwell on the rejection she experiences from others. She says, "Lord, it is enough; it is too much, that you communicate to me such delights!" [230] She identifies with the man born blind who has had a wonderful experience of Jesus, and then is rejected by the Pharisees. She addresses Jesus:

The man born blind, to whom you gave sight, was cast out of the synagogue because he praised you. He responded to those who, out of spite, remained ignorant of your eternal Being, your two admirably adorable births, your origin, and the place from which you came to visit them.

The two admirable births to which Jeanne refers are the eternal birth of the Son of God ("born of the Father before all ages"), and the natural birth of Jesus (born of Mary in the fullness of time). These two births are a common motif in Jeanne's writings as she elaborates on the Incarnation, which she sees in the mind of God before all time, yet unknown to humanity until the birth of Jesus.

The man born blind responds to what Jeanne views as a stubborn refusal to recognize God's presence in another human being. In Jesus' time, in Jeanne's time, in our time, it may seem astonishing that God would speak through someone whom others might consider undesirable. Jeanne quotes in Latin the response of the man:

"It is indeed astonishing because you do not know where he comes from, and he opened my eyes. From all ages, it is unheard of that anyone ever opened the eyes of one born blind. Unless this man were from God, he could not do any such thing" (Jn. 9:30, 32-33).

Now, Jeanne turns to her own experience, which resonates with that of the man:

Lord, for you, I could say the same words to those who oppose your glory. When you illuminated me by your divine splendors, I knew nothing of your lights, nor the motives that made you inclined to give me these graces. From all ages, it is unheard of that you told someone of your blessings who merited it less and was more unworthy than I.

It is clear that she understands that the grace God gives her does not come through her own merit, and does not make her any better than anyone else. Others may interpret it as vanity or presumption, yet Jeanne finds consolation in the abiding presence of God, even in the midst of trials and rejection:

If You were not God, whose wisdom is goodness and whose goodness is essential, who delight these favorable communications to little ones, You would not favor me in that way. If I told them these marvels, they would say, as did the Pharisees to the divinely enlightened blind man, that I wish to teach them. Since I am a woman, they would take this teaching for a sign of vanity and ambition to be the foundress of a new Order, for which they think that my imagination has invented the ideas.

She is speaking of the opposition that she experiences when she answers God's call to establish a religious Order which will be an "extension of the Incarnation". In her day, it was highly unusual for a woman to undertake the founding of a religious order without a male co-founder. She relied on God's help and on the guidance of her spiritual directors, not allowing the rejection she experienced to dissuade her. She continues:

Those who have sent me away because I wish to extend the glory of Jesus do not know that you have come to find me, saying lovingly to me, "Do you believe in the Son of God?" (cf. Jn 9:35)

If Jeanne were speaking today, she might say, here, "It's not about me. It's about God." Her faith in God is what sustains her in every trial. Here is where her experience departs from that of the man born blind. She knows Jesus. She is constantly aware of his presence, and when he calls to her, she responds in faith:

I do not respond to you, "Where is he that I may believe in him?" (Jn 9:36). I see you present with a loving presence and I adore you with all adorations. I firmly believe in you, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten and not made, born before all ages, and emanating eternally from the substance of your divine Father, you who out of love have come to take a body in the womb of the Virgin, your holy Mother, making yourself human to dwell with us, and to make known the excess of love which your divine Father has for humans.

Jeanne echoes the words of the creed, quoting in French, although she would have recited it in Latin. She keeps the wording of the creed except for the expression, *consubstantialem Patri* (consubstantial with the Father), which she explains as Jesus emanating eternally from the substance of the Father. She then expounds on the statement of faith: all that God does, Creation, Incarnation, presence among us, is done out of a superabundant love. This is why no amount of opposition, rejection, or disbelief can cause her to lose focus on what is most important in life - that God loves her and calls her to love others.

This Lent, and throughout our lives, may every trial we experience become for us an opportunity to see God in an unexpected place, to allow Jesus to heal us of our blindness, and to allow ourselves to fall ever more deeply in love with God.