

# JRS Lent Reflection

JESUIT REFUGEE SERVICE  
UNITED KINGDOM

A WEEKLY PRAYER RESOURCE

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT • SUNDAY 22ND MARCH 2020 •



## THIS WEEK'S GOSPEL

JOHN 9:1, 6-9, 13-17, 34-38

“Do you believe in the Son of Man? You are looking at him; he is speaking to you.”

As Jesus went along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. He spat on the ground, made a paste with the spittle, put this over the eyes of the blind man, and said to him, 'Go and wash in the Pool of Siloam' (a name that means 'sent'). So the blind man went off and washed himself, and came away with his sight restored. His neighbours and people who earlier had seen him begging said, 'Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?' Some said, 'Yes, it is the same one.' Others said, 'No, he only looks like him.' The man himself said, 'I am the man.'

They brought the man who had been blind to the Pharisees. It had been a sabbath day when Jesus made the paste and opened the man's eyes, so when the Pharisees asked him how he had come to see, he said, 'He put a paste on my eyes, and I washed, and I can see.' Then some of the Pharisees said, 'This man cannot be from God: he does not keep the sabbath.' Others said, 'How could a sinner produce signs like this?' And there was disagreement among them. So they spoke to the

blind man again, 'What have you to say about him yourself, now that he has opened your eyes?' 'He is a prophet' replied the man. 'Are you trying to teach us,' they replied 'and you a sinner through and through, since you were born!' And they drove him away. Jesus heard they had driven him away, and when he found him he said to him, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' 'Sir,' the man replied 'tell me who he is so that I may believe in him.' Jesus said, 'You are looking at him; he is speaking to you.' The man said, 'Lord, I believe', and worshipped him.

## AKBAR'S\* STORY

*Akbar\*, one of our refugee friends, was held in an immigration detention centre for many months. Upon his release, he quickly realised he had lost everything.*

**For many people who have been detained, life after release is often never the same as before. This was certainly true for Akbar, who was unable to enjoy any sense of 'liberty':**

"When I was released, when I came out, it was even very difficult for me to cross the road. My head was swinging. Because the pressure, your mind is just stick[ing to] one thing. You are not even

able to, especially with me, able to think differently, different things. You don't think about what will be. It was very, very, very, very difficult. I develop over there, like, anxiety and panic attacks and little bit of short-term

memory loss. So it was very, very difficult for me."

Upon release he very quickly realised he had lost everything; his accommodation, opportunities, and even relationships, which were now damaged by unjustified suspicion:

"I came to the house where I used to live, this person refused to give me the place. He was thinking that I did some kind of crime and I was in prison...because I was... they say if they detain you, why after seven, eight month ... why did they not deport you?' So all the people around me, their behaviour was changed. They don't trust me anymore."

**Regaining a sense of self-worth and agency over your life again is not easy, but by volunteering at the Red Cross, Akbar is able to feel like he is giving something back:**

It's like a hundred people to come over there. They eat over there and I wash. [...] all the time we have to [set up] the chairs, big tables, ... set up all the things for a breakfast, for the lunch, cutlery, dinner. At the end, it's like cleaning, like more brush and like all the things we



have to put back chairs, tables. You have to fold them. Oh, it's a great opportunity. I've passed my time. I feel satisfied that I'm giving something to community or my fellow peoples.. big, biggest thing is like it helped me inside that I'm doing something positive. Because like so many years, my life was not you can say not useless life.. so I find little bit cause of my life, that I'm helping....but it was in my nature."

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### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

This week's Gospel and Akbar's testimony both refer to drastic changes in the lives of those involved. Each of us similarly face a very significant change to our way of life. How might we use this time to allow us to focus our attention on God?



Akbar expresses the pain and uncertainty that comes from experiencing detention and destitution. How might the added stress and strain of this outbreak make the lives of the vulnerable even more difficult?



Jesus offers loving help to the blind man; Akbar does the same in his volunteering. Have I given this kind of practical and merciful help to others? Have I received it myself? What was that experience like? How might our current situation allow me to help others who are in need?



Is there anything I want to share with God – perhaps asking for forgiveness, healing or strength?

*\*To protect his identity, this is not his real name.*