

Sometimes when I drive by protestant Churches
and I see the title of the sermon on the sign board, I think to myself,
“I should start giving titles to my homilies as well.”
If I did, today’s homily would be entitled, “What exactly do **you** know?”

Then I would begin that homily with a story
that I have probably used before
but I would tell it with a slightly different twist.
The story is about t four blind men who were taken “to see” an elephant.
The object was to find out if they could identify
what kind of animal an elephant was
The first was led to the trunk of the elephant...
he felt the trunk for a while and then said,
“**I know** the elephant is an animal very much like a large snake.”
The second was led to the leg of the elephant. He felt the leg for a while
And then he said, “**I know** that the elephant is an animal
shaped much like the trunk of a tree.”
The third was led to the side of the elephant and he said,
“**I know** the elephant is an animal shaped like a large boulder.”
Finally the fourth man was led to the tusk of the elephant and he said,
“**I know** the elephant is an animal much like a saber or a sword.”

And it was only when the four of them got together
that they could then determine what kind of animal the elephant really was.

I have used that story in the past to illustrate the need for community,
But today I want to use that story and our gospel reading
as the launching point for my homily about what we claim to know.

It is amazing to me when I hear people
talk about what they know, or confess to what they don’t know.
Sometimes I hear arrogance, sometimes I hear confidence,
sometimes I hear humility, sometimes I hear faith,
and sometimes I hear foolishness.

Today’s Gospel is a perfect example.
Because lots of people are talking about what they know
or what they don’t know.

For instance, the scribes say,

“We **know** that this man does not come from God
because he heals on the Sabbath.”

I can hear the arrogance in their statement; and the implication
that God can only act in a way that **they believe** God should act.

And we still do that today...

A few years ago, a friend of mine had just returned from a vacation.

They told me, “We went to Mass at a Church called St. Mary’s,
but when we went in, there was a woman priest.

We didn’t know if we should leave or stay, but we stayed...

and everything was exactly as we do things here—even communion.”

I told them about some of the factions of our Church

that have broken away over the issue of women’s ordination,
and that was probably what they wandered into.

And then they asked me, “Well, was Christ present in the Eucharist?”

Now, I **know** what the Church teaches....

I **know** what many priest would say...

Like the scribes and Pharisees we still sometimes put God
into a neat little container...

God will only act the way **we know** God should act.

Was Christ present in the Eucharist?

My answer was....Christ is present everywhere.

Getting back to our Gospel...

The parents say, "We **know** that this is our son,

and we **know** that he was born blind;

but we do not **know** how it is that now he sees,

nor do we **know** who opened his eyes.

Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself."

Sometimes we sin in refusing to say what we know to be true.

Most of the time we are motivated out of fear.

The parents were afraid to acknowledge Jesus

because they might get thrown out of the temple.

Before we get too hard on them, how often do we back down from the truth
because we’re afraid?

Standing up against oppression.

Challenging that racist joke or statement.

How often, like those parents, do we not stand up for what is right
out of fear about what could happen to us.

Getting back to our Gospel:

They call the man over a second time and they said to him,
"Give glory to God! We **Know** that this man is a sinner."

Why do we do that? Why do we try to decide who is a sinner and who isn't?
Who belongs and who doesn't ...

If you're divorced and remarried you don't belong...

If you're gay you don't belong...

If you're a single parent, you don't belong....

If you're too young or too old you don't belong...

If you've had an abortion you don't belong...

If you're too liberal you don't belong...

If you're too conservative you don't belong...

If you have purple spiked hair, a nose rings, chains coming out your ears
and tattoos all over your body, you don't belong...

Why do we do this? Why do we seek to exclude?

Do we really believe it when we sing, "All are Welcome?"

When the blind man is told that Jesus is a sinner, I love the man's response,
"If he is a sinner I do not know.

What I do know is that I was blind and now I can see."

But, it doesn't take the man born blind long to fall into the trap himself.

He says, "We **know** that God does not listen to sinners,
but if one is devout and does his will, God listens to him."

Once again, why do we seek to divide?

God will listen to this one and not to that one?

Isn't it possible that God listens to everyone from the greatest believer
to the most hard-nosed atheist?

In the beginning of the Gospel,
the disciples presumed to know that **SOMEBODY** sinned.

They just weren't sure who.

The scribes and the Pharisees ultimately determine that **JESUS** is the sinner.

All this in an effort to prove what they **know**!

So what do you know?

The longer I live the more I realize that I really don't know a whole lot.

20th Century Theologian Karl Barth,

one whom Pope Pius XII said was the most important theologian
since Thomas Aquinas,

was asked toward the end of his life if he could sum up his life's work.

He thought for a moment and then said,

"Jesus loves me. This I know for the Bible tells me so."

That's what he knew. Not who the sinners were and who they weren't.

Not who was of God and who wasn't...not who belonged and who didn't.

Jesus loves me...this I know...

When all is said and done, maybe it's enough to know only that.