

4th Sunday of Lent 2017
St. Mary Catholic Church
Fr. Michael Renninger

He was caught in the blame game.

He was unhappy... and he blamed everyone else for his unhappiness.

To some, it seemed that Richard Paul Evans had everything you need to be happy. He was making a fortune writing books such as "The Christmas Box." He traveled the world, being paid handsomely for his time.

He had beautiful daughters, and a lovely wife.

But he was unhappy. And he blamed everyone else.

There were things that upset him in his career. So he blamed his agent.

At times he wasn't happy at home. He blamed his daughters.

He was *very* unhappy in his marriage. He blamed his wife. After all, she was distant, cold, always telling him he was not a good husband. He blamed her for his unhappiness.

And he blamed God for everything else.

On one of his book tours, he found himself at the Ritz Carlton in Atlanta.

He turned on the shower, and stood there as the water poured over him. And he started yelling at God. It was *God's fault* that his life was a mess. He told God how *unfair* it was for the Lord to expect Richard to stay in this terrible marriage.

Angry and sad, he sat down in the shower. And he started to see his life clearly. On one hand, he saw that he was famous and wealthy. But he also saw that he was addicted to porn, angry, and blaming his wife and God for his sadness.

He sensed that God was showing him something important. He sensed that God was saying, "Rick, stop blaming me, and stop blaming your wife. You can't change her. *You can only change yourself.*"

And for the first time in a long time, Richard started to pray. He prayed on the plane ride home. His wife was already asleep when he got home. He prayed as he lay down next to her.

And the next morning, he rolled over in bed and said something to his wife he had never said before. He said, “How can I make your day better?”

His wife looked at him with mistrust and said, “What?”

Rick repeated, “How can I make your day better?”

“You can’t,” she spat out. “Why are you asking me that?”

Rick replied, “Because I mean it. I want to know what I can do to make your day better.”

“You want to do something?” his wife sneered. “Go clean the kitchen.”

Rick nodded and said, “OK.” And he cleaned the kitchen.

The next day, Rick did the same thing: “What can I do to make your day better?”

His wife’s eyes narrowed and she said, “clean the garage.”

Rick took a deep breath. He already had a busy day planned. But he got up and spent two hours cleaning the garage.

The third morning, Rick asked, “What can I do not make your day better.” His wife shouted, “Nothing. Why are you doing this?” and Rick said, “Because I care about you. And I care about our marriage.”

Each morning he did this, until one day his wife said, “Tell me again – why are you doing this?” And he said, “because I love you, and I need to change. So what can I do not make your life better?” And she said, “Please spend some time with me today.”

They worked together on their marriage. They got good counselling. They still have things to work on even after 30 years together. But the darkness between them has become light. And neither of them is caught in the blame game anymore. Because one man came to realize, with God’s help, that the blame game never results in positive change.

As we listened to the life-changing story of the man born blind in John’s Gospel, did you notice how much *blaming* is going on?

It's there right from the beginning. Jesus meets a man who has been blind from birth, and his disciples ask, "Whose fault is it that this guy is blind? Who's to blame? Did his parents commit some kind of sin? Did *he* sin?" That may sound odd to modern ears. Why blame a physical ailment on sin?

At the time of Jesus, people thought that God would punish sinners by causing them to get sick, or by causing someone they loved to get sick. So, if a child was born blind, it must be proof that God was unhappy with somebody! Jesus' disciples want to know – *who can we blame?*

By the way – we still do this, don't we? We may not blame *God*, but how often have you heard someone say, "Well, he drank like a fish – no wonder his liver gave out. She smoked like a chimney – no wonder she got lung cancer." The blame game is alive and well.

So, as this encounter begins, people want to know: who can we blame for this man's *sickness*. But quickly the conversation changes, and people want to know: who can we blame for this man's *cure* !?!?

As soon as Jesus has healed the man's blindness, the religious leaders start to ask: "who can we blame for this healing on the Sabbath. Who can we blame for this miracle?"

The man can't answer that question. He simply tells his story. "Jesus put mud on my eyes, told me to wash. I was blind, now I see."

The religious leaders fail to see the truth. They need to blame other people, so they are blind to the fact that they themselves have never healed ANYONE by their blaming. And Jesus, who shatters the cycle of blaming, is opening the eyes of a man who had never seen anything before, and now he saw everything clearly. The darkness was gone. The blaming was useless. He could see, and his life was changed.

My friends, we live in a culture which is teaching us that the blame game is the best game to play. We are taught to blame someone else for *everything* in our lives, so that we don't have to take responsibility for *anything* in our lives.

+ Like the parent whose child misbehaves at school, and then blames the child's teachers for being unfair. That parent is teaching that child to become an adult who never takes personal responsibility, who blames others for everything.

+ In Washington, politicians fail to act for the common good, then blame each other for the stalemates and quagmires.

+ The citizens who blame their community's problems on everyone else, but they never seem to become agents of positive change.

+ The adult who blames their unhappiness on a trauma or event in their past, is perpetually controlled by the past, and can never embrace joy in the present.

We are teaching our children how to be victims, without equipping them to be victors.

We are enabling people to take offense at everything, without equipping them with the skills to deal with anything.

We are teaching spouses how to blame each other for their unhappiness, without saying to them, "The only person who can change is you. Do it, with God's help, and see what happens next."

Richard Paul Evans was blinded by the blame game, until God got his attention in a shower in Atlanta. Like the man in today's Gospel, Richard had his eyes opened, and he finally began to see how to live as a follower of Jesus.

In some ways, we all share in that blindness. And we all play the blame game.

What a waste of energy.

In the days ahead, turn to the people in your life. And instead of blaming them for something, simply say to them: *How can I make your day better?*

And as you do so, remember this: every morning, when you wake up, the Risen Lord Jesus is asking you the same the question.