

Essay on “Blind Man”

BY KATHERINE COWLEY

The first time I read “Blind Man,” it took my breath away. As I read the poem aloud, I felt like I was not just quoting someone else’s words, but that I myself was the speaker—the imperfect soul blessed by Christ even though I don’t always have faith that I can be healed.

The power of the poem is that it comes from the perspective of a far-from-perfect speaker who’s near the beginning of his path but still is given a miracle, still experiences Christ’s redeeming power. The beginning lines of the poem reflect the speaker’s position through language that emphasizes the trivial rather than the power of God. Insignificant words like “that” and “which” are placed in positions of rhythmic emphasis at the ends of lines. Then the poem shifts focus, emphasizing words like “dust,” “imperfection,” “blackness,” “confusion,” or, in sum, the strangeness of having mud applied to the eyes. We as readers, like the blind man, question how the Master shapes us unable to see beyond our narrow-minded expectations.

The enjambment—lines ending without punctuation, without closure—moves us forward through the reflections: a soliloquy of self-exploration, self-questioning, and self-learning, a contrast to the dialogue with the Pharisees found in John 9. The translation from dialogue to monologue is key to the poem—this piece of LDS art is not about defending Mormonism to the “other;” it’s about strengthening and understanding ourselves.

Some of the best new LDS art is like “Blind Man.” It’s not about presenting a polished, epic happily-ever-after. It’s about experiencing the imperfect strivings of others as we go about our own imperfect strivings as parents and spouses, as nursery leaders and teachers, and as neighbors and friends. And in our strivings, the Lord blesses us with miracles. Religious art is valuable when it helps us work through our doubts and reminds us that we are not perfect, and that no matter how hard we strive, Christ will always be saving us from our blindness. ■