

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT, CYCLE A

Open with a prayer: *Blessed are you, God of light for you have opened our eyes to see your truth and to know your love. Open the eyes of our heart as we journey through Lent so that we may perceive even more clearly the signs of your love that surrounds us. Enlighten our minds and hearts so that we may recognize the word you wish us to hear in our readings this week.*

Sharing of life: How is your Lenten journey coming? Have you lost your focus a bit or is your journey going pretty well?

Facilitator reads focus statement: In the early centuries of the church, baptism was sometimes called “enlightenment”. Light has been used as a metaphor for belief in God from Gospel times, and so it was a natural step to refer to the Christian initiation as a process of enlightenment, a “coming to see” that Jesus is Lord and Savior. This ‘seeing’ imagery dominates all of today’s readings and provides the key to interpreting them in the context of the Lenten season’s focus on preparation for baptism or renewal of one’s baptismal commitment to Christ. For the *Elect*, Lent is a *Period of Purification and Enlightenment*. As we journey with our brothers and sisters, we too seek to be *purified* of false values and sin so that we can more clearly *see* God’s truth and live as children of light.

If you have not read the commentary on the three readings prior to your meeting, consider reading it either before or after you read each reading.

FIRST READING: 1 Samuel 16: 1, 6-7, 10-13

Samuel is seeking a successor for Saul. He thinks that surely God’s choice is one of the seven sons who are present when he arrives. God’s choice of David is a concrete example of how God’s choices are not ours. Who but God would choose the young and inexperienced David to be the symbol of God’s power and strength? God sees in people what we fail to see. David may have been young and inexperienced, but he also had the inner disposition that God was looking for, namely, love of and loyalty to God. The anointing was a solemn ritual action sealing God’s election of David. During this Lenten season as we examine our consciences and as the elect prepare for baptism, this reading reminds us that we must always seek to see as God sees. At baptism we too were anointed with oil to remind us that God has a special mission for us.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 23

The sentiments in this most loved of the psalms can be applied to both David and the man healed in today’s Gospel.

SECOND READING: Ephesians 5:8-14

Commenting on this reading, Fr. Lawrence Mick writes:

Those who sin prefer the darkness. They do not want their deeds to be seen or their thoughts to be known. Thieves and murderers prefer the dark. So do those who commit lesser sins. Thus coming into the light is an image of conversion.

In this passage, though, Paul goes further and suggests that we not only live in the light of Christ but also become light for others. If we produce “goodness and righteousness and truth,” then we light the way for others and make their lives brighter. That’s a good goal for each of us this Lent.

GOSPEL: John 9:1-41

In last weekend’s gospel, Jesus revealed himself to a nameless Samaritan woman. In this week’s gospel, Jesus reveals himself to a nameless blind man as One who gives the Light of Faith. The atmosphere of hostility and controversy, which pervades the story, symbolizes the struggle, which goes on between light and darkness, belief and unbelief. As in last week’s Gospel, the story operates on different levels. On *one level*, we notice a man receiving *physical* sight. On *another level*, we see the same man receive *spiritual* sight. On a *third level*, there is a contrast between the

openness of the blind man to Jesus and the closed-mindedness of the Pharisees to him.

The story begins with the disciples asking if the man's blindness was caused by his sin or the sin of his parents. Jesus answers "neither," thus dissenting from the traditional belief that sickness and suffering in a person's life were caused by one's sinfulness. As a result of a Ritual Washing, the man is healed of his blindness, which symbolizes the enlightenment we receive in the sacramental waters of baptism. Then the healed one undergoes a series of interrogations. During the interrogations, we notice how the blind man *gradually* comes to recognize the true nature of Jesus. First he calls Jesus "*that man*" then "*a prophet*" and finally, he worships Jesus as the "*Son of Man*". In the story, the blind man represents people who overcome many obstacles as they come to faith. He also represents those who suffer ostracization because of faith.

As we sadly watch the blind man gradually move into the "light of faith", we sadly notice the Pharisees move into the "darkness of unbelief", a movement, which reaches its climax when the Pharisees call Jesus "a sinner". The Pharisees also call the blind man a sinner. But as the story unfolds, we clearly see that the real sinners are the Pharisees, not because they do not see, but because they insist that they do see and, therefore, have no need for enlightenment. In the story, the Pharisees represent all those who claim that they "see" just because they have a head knowledge of their religion. In the story, the parents represent those who feared expulsion from the Jewish community for believing in Jesus. They also represent the weak side of us that is not willing to risk much for our faith.

The Christian journey is a movement out of the "darkness of unbelief" into the "light of faith". During the coming week, we might want to reflect on our own Christian journey. We may want to name and give thanks for the people and events that opened our eyes to Jesus and his values. We might also want to think about the things in our lives that presently hinder us from moving more and more into the light.

As for this gospel's *sacramental significance*, Jesus' cure of the blind man is replete with baptismal references. Healed and anointed and enlightened by Jesus, the blind man who came to see and believe in Jesus is the type of every baptized believer. Washed and anointed at baptism, we are to live in the light of faith, walk by the light of truth and follow Jesus who is the light of the world in all we are, in all we do, in all we say.

FAITH SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What verse spoke to you most and why?
2. The first reading is a good example of how God sees not as humans see. Name ways in which the world's view of things differs from the gospel view. What do we need to do to bring our view more in line with the gospel?
3. In the gospel the religious leaders move in the direction of darkness and unbelief. What happens in the souls of good people to move them in the direction of unbelief? Has it happened to you?
4. In the past year or more can you name one or more ways that you have become more enlightened?

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Name one way you can act on God's word in today's readings. Suggestions: Take the Pharisees question to prayer: "Since it was your eyes he opened, what do you have to say about him?" Reflect on this question and see where it takes you. Begin to prepare to receive the *Sacrament of Reconciliation* by asking the Holy Spirit to reveal to you areas of sinful attitudes and behaviors that you may be blind to.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Pray for all who suffer from physical blindness and for those involved in research to find a cure. Pray for the elect as they prepare for their second *Scrutiny*. Pray for all of us that we be graced with the ability to see as God sees.©