

FOURTH SUNDAY

OF LENT

YEAR A



### Prayer

#### *Psalm 23:1–6*

The LORD is my shepherd,  
I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in  
green pastures; he leads  
me beside still waters; he  
restores my soul. He leads  
me in right paths for his  
name's sake.

Even though I walk  
through the darkest valley,  
I fear no evil; for you are  
with me; your rod and  
your staff — they comfort  
me.

You prepare a table before  
me in the presence of  
my enemies; you anoint  
my head with oil; my cup  
overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy  
shall follow me all the days  
of my life, and I shall dwell  
in the house of the LORD  
my whole life long.

### Reading the Word

#### *First Reading:*

*1 Samuel 16:1, 6–7, 10–13*

The LORD said to Samuel,  
“How long will you grieve  
over Saul? I have rejected  
him from being king over  
Israel. Fill your horn with oil  
and set out; I will send you to

Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I  
have provided for myself a  
king among his sons.”

When they came, he looked  
on Eliab and thought, “Surely  
the LORD’s anointed is now  
before the LORD.” But the  
LORD said to Samuel, “Do  
not look on his appearance  
or on the height of his stat-  
ure, because I have rejected  
him; for the LORD does not  
see as mortals see; they look  
on the outward appearance,  
but the LORD looks on the  
heart.”

Jesse made seven of his sons  
pass before Samuel, and  
Samuel said to Jesse, “The  
LORD has not chosen any of  
these.” Samuel said to Jesse,  
“Are all your sons here?” And  
he said, “There remains yet  
the youngest, but he is keep-  
ing the sheep.” And Samuel  
said to Jesse, “Send and bring  
him; for we will not sit down  
until he comes here.” He sent  
and brought him in. Now he  
was ruddy, and had beautiful  
eyes, and was handsome. The  
LORD said, “Rise and anoint  
him; for this is the one.” Then  
Samuel took the horn of  
oil, and anointed him in the  
presence of his brothers; and  
the spirit of the LORD came

### FIRST READING

*1 Samuel 16:1, 6–7, 10–13*

### PSALM

*Psalm 23:1–6*

### SECOND READING

*Ephesians 5:8–14*

### GOSPEL

*John 9:1, 6–9, 13–17, 34–38*

mightily upon David from  
that day forward. Samuel  
then set out and went to  
Ramah.

#### *Second Reading:*

*Ephesians 5:8–14*

Once you were darkness, but  
now in the Lord you are light.  
Live as children of light— for  
the fruit of the light is found  
in all that is good and right  
and true. Try to find out  
what is pleasing to the Lord.  
Take no part in the unfruit-  
ful works of darkness, but  
instead expose them. For it  
is shameful even to mention  
what such people do secretly;  
but everything exposed by  
the light becomes visible, for  
everything that becomes vis-  
ible is light. Therefore it says,  
“Sleeper, awake! Rise from  
the dead, and Christ will  
shine on you.”

#### *Gospel:*

*John 9:1, 6–9, 13–17, 34–38*

As Jesus walked along, he saw  
a man blind from birth. He  
then spat on the ground and  
made mud with the saliva and  
spread the mud on the man's  
eyes, saying to him, “Go, wash

*Scripture quotations from  
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in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.”

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, “He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.” Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.” But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” And they were divided. So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” He said, “He is a prophet.”

They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out.

Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” He answered, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.” Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.” He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him.

## Hearing the Word

### *“Seeing as God Sees”*

The liturgy of this Sunday of Lent introduces the theme of seeing, with a reflection on the capacity of perceiving oneself and seeing the world through eyes enlightened by God and his word.

In the first reading the Lord reproaches Samuel for grieving for Saul, the first king of Israel, whom he had previously anointed. This first king was a tragic figure, rejected as a leader because of his repeated disobedience. From the human point of view Saul had all the qualities needed to be a capable and impressive ruler. The text affirms that “there was no other Israelite more handsome than Saul; he stood head and shoulders above the people” (1 Sam 9:2). Still, he failed the most important test for any ruler, that of obedient listening to the Lord. To replace him, God chose another man who would lead his people, and Samuel, God’s prophet, was sent to the house of Jesse in Bethlehem to identify and anoint him.

At the presentation of Jesse’s sons, the prophet, as was the case with Saul, paid attention to the external appearances of the potential candidates and judged them accordingly. The first one, Eliab, was immediately chosen by Samuel who observed his “lofty stature”. But the Lord saw and judged differently. He corrected and instructed Samuel stating that “the Lord does not see as mortals see;

they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart”. Samuel was to abandon not only grieving for the handsome and tall Saul, but also to change his way of assessing the value of persons. Samuel’s “sight” had to be healed and transformed by accepting God’s way of “seeing”. God’s way of seeing goes deeper and beyond the physical, the obvious and the visible. It reaches the heart of a person and recognizes what lies beneath the surface and the facade of appearances. David was anointed because, in the long run and despite his faults, he would remain loyal to God. This was the reason why he found favor in God’s eyes. The text states that David had “fine eyes”. The faithful heart of this newly appointed king was recognizable in the graciousness reflected in his eyes.

The metaphors associated with seeing, light and darkness are also found in Paul’s address to the Ephesians. Writing to this community he stated that “once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light”. In the context, it is clear that the situation of darkness described the life of immorality and disobedience to the demands of life in God’s kingdom. Such behavior was typical for idolaters (cf. Eph 5:5). On the other hand, living “as children of light” meant the conduct suitable for a Christian as one that bears fruits “in all that is good and right and true”.

A life filled with the light remains a constant challenge for the faithful because a person must clearly perceive “what is pleasing to the Lord”, and this search for the will of God is not easy because it often remains hidden. It requires a clear-seeing eye, a sight purified by the study of God’s word, persistent prayer and honesty in dealing with others and ourselves. The context of the letter to the Ephesians suggests these as ways of coming to the light and combating the errors of darkness. With life thus enlightened and visible, the Ephesians would be imitators of God (cf. Eph 5:1), and would be able to follow their master Jesus who provides the necessary light to direct a believer’s life.

In the Gospel passage we read a shortened story of the healing of a man blind from birth. Jesus approached this man with great respect. According to the customs of the day he made clay with saliva and smeared it on the blind man’s eyes. He then commanded the man to go and wash his eyes in the Pool of Siloam. As the man obediently fulfilled Jesus’ command, his sight was restored.

But the healing of the blind man did not stop on the physical level. The story is symbolic and focuses on spiritual healing. Through the healing and further contact with Jesus, the man gradually grew in his understanding of Jesus’ identity. First, he considered Jesus just a healer, a miracle worker

who helped him to regain physical sight. Next, after the dialogue with doubting Pharisees, the former blind man acknowledged Jesus as “a prophet”. Finally, during the second meeting with Jesus and enlightened by his words, this man who once was blind professed Jesus as the “Lord” and worshiped him. His capacity of seeing fundamentally changed on the level of faith. In this story “to see” becomes a synonym for “to believe”. The man was healed from blindness to God’s presence in the world. He was allowed to see God in Jesus and find new life guided by this insight. Restoration of sight in this story was about recognizing Jesus as God’s Son and believing in him.

Today’s readings teach that the human way of seeing and evaluating others, needs God’s healing touch. This was evident in the case of Samuel who, despite his prophetic insight, judged on the basis of appearances. For the Ephesians, their way of practicing Christianity was to live in the light and as the children of light, allowing their existence to be illumined by the light of the Risen Christ. For the blind man in the Gospel story, the physical healing of blindness led him to the right perception of Jesus, and, eventually, to saving faith. To see as God sees is to find a guiding light that leads to salvation. The Psalmist knew this truth when he composed his beautiful poem that states, “even though I walk through the

darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me”.

### **Listening to the Word of God**

Today we are invited to look at how we see ourselves and others. We live in a world where we are not viewed and evaluated through God’s lens. We judge and are judged mostly through our external appearances and perceivable accomplishments. Our value is often decided on the basis of how we appear or what we are capable of achieving. In our time there is much emphasis on the way we look. Are we dressed correctly? Have we got the latest fashions? Have we got the latest mobile phone? Are we using the best skin creams and lotions? These are worldly things designed to improve our outward appearances, but they do not impress God. What do you see when you look into a mirror? Do you see blemishes and wonder where they came from? What do you see when looking into your heart? Do you see scars from abuse, brokenness and loss? Do you see choices you regret and action you wish were never done? What do you see when you look into the future? Do you see hopelessness, and more aches and pains?

Based on appearances, we tend to see ourselves in three ways. First, the negative way – I am so bad, I continue to fall into the same sins and God cannot possibly love me. Second, the deceptive way – I am so much better than other people and therefore I must be special in God’s eyes. Third, the real way – I am somewhere in-between greatness and imperfection, an ordinary human being with great potential but also with many limitations and problems. The first point for reflection today

must therefore be the question, "How do we see ourselves and how do we act on it?"

Today's readings challenge us to go beyond our outward appearances and examine ourselves from the point of view of how God sees us and how God sees others. What does God see when he looks at us? God sees us objectively. He sees how different people have helped or hurt us. He sees our disappointments, our fear, our failures and how all these have changed us in positive and negative ways. He also sees our goodness and generosity, our positive qualities, our gifts and contributions. He sees and recognizes that we are doing our best. He notices our striving for love and success and our search for answers, even though we often do not know where to look.

Most importantly, we are taught today that God ignores our appearances but sees our humanity through the eyes of unconditional love and acceptance. Our problems, selfishness, vanities, anxieties often blind us to this very basic fact. God's view is made obvious by the coming of his son sent to save us. Furthermore, where we, like Samuel, see only human limits, weakness and brokenness, God sees an opportunity to reveal himself. The blindness of the man in the Gospel story was used by Jesus to lead him to faith. Even our faults and limits do not prevent God from acting through us.

God's love for and confidence in us teaches us about the basic way in which we need to perceive ourselves and others. Instead of putting ourselves down or above others, we are called to always keep in mind that no matter who and what

we are, we are valuable and important in our own unique ways. This will teach us respect for ourselves and for others, it will help us to see as God sees.

### Proverb

**“A person  
always  
looking  
at the sky  
will never  
discover  
anything  
on the  
ground.”**

### Action

#### Self-examination

Reflect on experiences

when you saw and evaluated others only through the external appearances and accomplishments. Was it a fair evaluation?

What is my self-perception? I reflect on how I see myself in the light of today's readings.

### Response to God

I will confess the sins of evaluating and judging others on the basis of their outward appearance by you, your group and your parish. I will also pray for a new beginning, to be able to see through God's eyes, to see humanity as Christ sees humanity, with unconditional love.

### Response to your World

I will make an attempt to get to know and understand the person whom I judged and shun on the basis of external appearances.

Whom have we excluded from our group by judging him or her through outward appearances? How can we reintegrate such individual(s) back into our community?

### Prayer

Help me Lord to see people and the world as you see them, to see through the eyes of your Son, and according to the light of your Spirit.

Clear away the clouds and distortions of reality that make me blind. Help me to see your will, not mine.

Help me to be humble enough to admit when I have been wrong or when I have held on to beliefs, attitudes and opinions that are not yours.

Help me to see and act so that I may accomplish the mission in life that you have entrusted to me. Amen

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