Fourth Sunday of Lent

READ
1 Samuel 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a
Psalm 23:1-3a, 3b, 4, 5, 6
Ephesians 5:8-14
John 9:1, 6-9, 13-17, 34-38

“Sin is a blindness of the spirit, which prevents us from seeing what is most important, from fixing our gaze on the love that gives us life. This blindness leads us little by little to dwell on what is superficial, until we are indifferent to others and to what is good.” – Pope Francis, homily, March 5, 2016

REFLECTION
In today’s world it is easy to paint Jesus as just a “nice guy” or a good teacher. That puts him comfortably in a place where we can ignore him. However, Jesus claims in today’s Gospel that he is the light of the world, and he strongly condemns the actions of the Pharisees (who were regarded as holy teachers) as sinful. Jesus was not just a “nice guy!” C.S. Lewis wrote in Mere Christianity that Jesus had to be one of three things: a complete lunatic, a demonic liar, or who he claimed to be – the Lord himself. We cannot simply regard him as a nice person and shove him aside. Do I take Jesus’ words seriously? Do I truly believe that he is God and that he is taking care of everything? Do I trust him with my life and live as if he is the light of the world?

ACTION
Light is necessary for sight. Without light we are lost in darkness. Light from a fire or the sun is also associated with warmth and thriving. In the second reading, St. Paul encourages the early Christians to live as children of light. What does this mean? Using this allegory, make a list of all the ways that we can live in the light of Christ. Examples are brightening someone’s day with sincere compliments, avoiding gossip or other activities of “darkness,” and looking for ways to ease your parents’ burden by looking for ways to help care for your home.

“Darkness can only be scattered by light. Hatred can only be conquered by love.”
-St. Pope John Paul II

REFLECT ON THE WORD
The story of the man born blind is one that has layers of meaning. First, we meet the man born blind. In his time people would have believed that he was born blind because of his own sins or those of his parents. In those days too, a blind man would have likely been very poor, and unable to work. A spouse and children, which was of utmost importance to the Jewish people, would have been impossible for this man as he wouldn’t have been able to support them. In Jesus’ time, such a disability was socially unsurmountable. The man was a beggar who depended on other’s charity in order to eat.

When he met Jesus, it was a Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath. On the Sabbath, no work was ever done because the Jewish people followed the Ten Commandments closely. In the story, Jesus spit in the dirt to make mud and smeared it on the man’s eyes. Jesus told him to wash in the pool of Siloam, and the man was healed of his blindness. When his neighbors brought him to the Pharisees, an argument occurred as to whether or not Jesus was of God. When the man himself claimed Jesus was a prophet, the Pharisees threw him out, saying the man shouldn’t be trying to teach them. Later, the man worshiped Jesus knowing he was the Son of Man.
What calamity surrounded this healing Gospel story! In the layers of the story we see first Jesus’ power over human illness. Jesus, as he does in so many stories, brings wholeness to the man born blind. Jesus’ healing changed the man’s life ultimately – besides being able to function in an ancient society not easily navigated by the disabled, the man made the spiritual step of knowing the identity of Jesus and worshipped him. The Pharisees, who were considered to be holy, learned people, were not able to see the identity of Jesus. As He does in many places in the Bible, Jesus made the last to be first.

This story highlights spiritual blindness, something that was prevalent in Jesus’ time and prevalent now.

Have you ever met someone who preaches kindness but is kind of cruel to others?

Maybe someone in your life is somewhat two-faced, talking about honesty and truthfulness while cheating on school tests. While this example may not describe you in particular, we all have our faults, shortcomings and sins, and we all have spiritual blindness. We are all in need of forgiveness. Spiritual blindness is the inability to see or perceive one’s own spiritual shortcomings. Lent is a time the Church wisely gives us – it is a time we commit ourselves to uncovering our own spiritual blindness so that Jesus can heal our sins and shortcomings in life. All of us have such shortcomings, and during Lent we have the opportunity to thoughtfully examine our faults and sins, and work toward living a better life through Jesus Christ. Every Lent throughout your life you have a wonderful opportunity to grow in your relationship with God by addressing your own areas of spiritual blindness.

What is a spiritual blindness that you have grown past? What is one you think you need to consider in prayer?

How are you progressing in your Lenten discipline?
Do you need any support in what you have chosen to do?

With about two weeks remaining in Lent, do you have any spiritual practices you’d like to complete, such as Reconciliation, spending time in service to your community or spending time in front of the tabernacle?

ACT ON THE WORD

Lectio Divina is an ancient form of prayer, medication, and encouraging Scripture. The Latin phrase Lectio Divina means holy reading, and this form of prayer was used in the early centuries of the Church. The main steps of the Lectio Divina are as follows:

- Quiet the environment, the body, and the mind.
- Read a selected Scripture passage slowly.
- Pause for reflection and read the passage again.
- Pause for reflection and read the passage a third time.

Lord Jesus Christ, you opened the eyes of the blind man, and you can open our eyes too. Help us to see your truth and embrace the power of light over darkness so that we will be transformed in your love. You live and reign for ever and ever.

Amen.