**Fourth Sunday of Lent**

**Scripture Readings**

**First Reading: 1 Samuel 16:1, 6-7, 10-13**

The Lord said to Samuel: “Fill your horn with oil, and be on your way. I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem, for I have chosen my king from among his sons.” As Jesse and his sons came to the sacrifice, Samuel looked at Eliab and thought, “Surely the Lord’s anointed is here before him.” But the Lord said to Samuel: “Do not judge from his appearance or from his lofty stature, because I have rejected him. Not as man sees does God see, because man sees the appearance but the Lord looks into the heart.” In the same way Jesse presented seven sons before Samuel, but Samuel said to Jesse, “The Lord has not chosen any one of these.” Then Samuel asked Jesse, “Are these all the sons you have?” Jesse replied, “There is still the youngest, who is tending the sheep.” Samuel said to Jesse, “Send for him; we will not begin the sacrificial banquet until he arrives here.” Jesse sent and had the young man brought to them. He was ruddy, a youth handsome to behold and making a splendid appearance. The Lord said, “There—anoint him, for this is the one!” Then Samuel, with the horn of oil in hand; anointed David in the presence of his brothers; and from that day on, the spirit of the Lord rushed upon David.

**Second Reading: Ephesians 5:8-14**

Brothers and sisters: You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light, for light produces every kind of goodness and righteousness and truth. Try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the fruitless works of darkness; rather expose them, for it is shameful even to mention the things done by them in secret; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore, it says: “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.”

**Gospel: John 9:1-41**

As Jesus passed by he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus answered, “Neither he nor his parents sinned; it is son that the works of God might be made visible through him. We have to do the works of the one who sent me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva, and smeared the clay on his eyes, and said to him, “Go wash in the Pool of Siloam”—which means Sent--. So he went and washed, and came back able to see. His neighbors and those who had seen him earlier as a beggar said, “Isn’t he the one who used to sit and beg?” Some said, “It is,” but others said, “No, he just looks like him.” He said, “I am.” So they said to him, “How were your eyes opened?” He replied, “The man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and told me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ So I went there and washed and was able to see.” And they said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I don’t know.” They brought the one who was once blind to the Pharisees. Now Jesus had made clay and opened his eyes on a sabbath. So then the Pharisees also asked him how he was able to see. He said to them “He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and now I can see.” So some of the Paharisees said, “This man is not from God, because he does not keep the sabbath.” But others said, “How can a sinful man do such signs?” And there was a division among them.

 So they said to the blind man again, “What do you have to say about him, since he opened your eyes?” He said, “He is a prophet.” Now the Jews did not believe that he had been blind and gained his sight until they summoned the parents of the one who had gained his sight. They asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How does he now see?” His parents answered and said, “We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. We do not know how he sees now, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him, he is of age; he can speak for himself.” His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone acknowledged him as the Christ, he would be expelled from the synagogue. For this reason his parents said, “He is of age; question him.” So a second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, “Give God the praise! We know that this man is a sinner.” He replied, “If he is a sinner, I do not know. One thing I do know is that I was blind and now I see.” So they said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” He answered them, “I told you already and you do not listen. Why do you want to hear it again.? Do you want to become his disciples, too?” They ridiculed him and said, “You are that man’s disciple; we are disciples of Moses! We know that God spoke to Moses, but we do not know where this one is from.” The man answered and said to them, “This is what is so amazing, that you do not know where he is from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if one is devout and does his will, he listens to him. It is unheard of that anyone ever opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he would not be able to do anything.” They answered and said to him, “You were born totally in sin, and are you trying to teach us?” Then they threw him out. When Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, he found him and said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” He answered and said, “Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?” Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.” He said, “I do believe, Lord,” and he worshiped him. Then Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see might see, and those who do see might become blind.” Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not also blind, are we?” Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you are saying, ’We see,’ so your sin remains.”

**Fourth Sunday of Lent**

**Opening Prayer**

**Psalm 23**

**All: The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.**

**Side 1;** he Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. In verdant pastures he gives me repose; beside restful waters he leads me; he refreshes my soul.

**All: The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.**

**Side 2:** He guides me in right paths for his name’s sake. Even though I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil; for you are at my side with your rod and your staff that give me courage.

**All: The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.**

**Side 1:** You spread the table before me in the sight of my foes; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

**All: The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.**

**Side 2:** Only goodness and kindness follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for years to come.

**All: The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.**

**O God, who through your Word reconcile the human race to yourself in a wonderful way, grant, we pray, that with prompt devotion and eager faith the Christian people may hasten toward the solemn celebrations to come. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.**

***Preface: The Man Born Blind***

*By the mystery of the Incarnation he has led the human race that walked in darkness into the radiance of the faith and has brought those born in slavery to ancient sin through the waters of regeneration to make them your adopted children.*

**Fourth Sunday of Lent**

**What Does It All Mean?**

**First Reading 1 Samuel 16:1, 6-7, 10-13**

Saul, the first king of Israel, is paranoid and probably insane. He must be replaced, and the Lord has told Samuel to anoint one of the sons of Jesse. To elude Saul’s suspicions, Samuel travels under the pretext of performing a sacrifice, taking a heifer to Bethlehem. Reviewing each of the sons, Samuel guesses incorrectly. At last Jesse summons the youngest, and the Lord tells Samuel that this David will be king. God does not see as we see, because we look at appearances, while God looks into the heart.

**Second Reading: Ephesians 5:8-14**

The author of this letter (almost certainly not Paul) introduces a simple and powerful image. The Christians at Ephesus once dwelt in darkness, but now they are children of light. Light produces every kind of goodness and justice and truth, while “vain deeds done in darkness” must produce evil, injustice, and falsehood. The reading concludes with a formula prayer that was probably well-known to the original audience: “Awake, O sleeper, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.” Most scholars agree that these words were pronounced at many early baptism liturgies.

**Gospel: John 9:1-41**

Jesus gives sight to a man born blind. This simple and yet astonishing act lies at the core of drama exploring the struggle between light and darkness, a major theme in John’s gospel, and the focus of the second scrutiny. Here Jesus, the light of the world, wins several victories over darkness. First, he accomplishes a healing unparalleled in ancient times. Second, he illustrates the overwhelming power of God’s glory, vanquishing sin, which stands no chance. Third, the behavior of authorities shows them to remain, in every way, in the dark. Encountering a man blind since birth, the disciples ask Jesus a legalistic question. Is he blind because of his sin, or because of a sin of his ancestors? Jesus introduces a third possibility, that the man is blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. Then, spitting on the ground, he makes mud, which he rubs on the man’s eyes. When the man obeys Jesus’ order to wash, he sees. The man’s troubles have just begun. Astonished neighbors demand an explanation. He can only offer a simple description of his experience. The neighbors take him to the authorities who debate the theological significance of the miracle, question the man’s parents, and interrogate the man a second time. Placing Jesus on trial by proxy, they demand to hear the man’s story again. He states explicitly the drama’s central point: “you do not know who Jesus is, but only God can accomplish what he has done.” In a final scene, the man sees Jesus for the first time. Professing his belief, he bows in worship.

It is unfortunate that John’s gospel casts Jesus’ victory over the authorities in anti-Jewish terms. Today we must recognize this bias and correct similar tendencies in ourselves. To perpetuate anti-Jewishness or any other form of racism is to dwell in precisely the darkness that Jesus has cast out. This story connects light, life, and baptism. To refuse to believe is to remain in darkness, to continue in sin; but to believe is to see. The story also makes a subtle point. To be sure, God’s works are revealed when the man washes his eyes in the pool. But they are revealed more clearly as he narrates his experience and grows into a profession of faith. The second scrutiny invites us to allow Christ’s light to illuminate every last nook and cranny in our lives. It celebrates the miracle of light in our lives, and the even greater miracle of the elect professing their faith before the world. It insists that we stop pretending to see when we do not, and to open our eyes.

**Let’s Talk About It**

**How and where did your faith begin? How was your faith tested early, and how have you been tested more recently?**

**How do you see God working, in the lives of people around you, and in your own life?**

**Bodyguard**

For what purpose were you created? What vocation did God place within you to fulfill? Many walk through life in darkness, unable to answer either of the previous questions. Once we come to know God as Father through our baptism and begin to seek and discern his will for our lives, the darkness fades away and we walk in the light. St. Paul illuminates this point beautifully for the Ephesians in this week’s second reading. For just as the man born blind only finally “sees” thanks to Christ in the gospel passage, we only come to understand life’s purpose and our role within God’s plan of salvation by way of Christ and his sacraments. Just as the miraculous healing of Christ points us to our baptism, David’s anointing in the first reading also has an almost sacramental feel to it. While Confirmation did not exist in its current understanding in the time of David, the anointing with oil and “the spirit of the Lord” rushing upon the young man certainly has sacramental undertones and foreshadowing. While you may not fully comprehend what your future holds or what you are to do or who you are to become, the great news as echoed in the psalm is that you have nothing to fear. If you know, love, and serve God, he will be with you, at your side, to go before you and cast his light into all darkness. You need not fear; you need only say “yes.” God’s plan for you is perfect and far better than anything you could ever come up with on your own.

**Lord’s Prayer**

**Come, Holy Spirit. Flood my heart. Lead me closer to the Father, the Good Shepherd. God, thank you for always watching over me. I know you will always provide for me, watching over me. I know you will always provide for me. Through your generosity, I will never be found wanting. Today, help me to reflect on your path for me. Sometimes I’m not sure where you have me at that very moment, but I always know where you are leading me: to you. Amen.**