

Fourth Sunday of Lent

Joseph Milner

[Reading I: 1 Samuel 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a](#) [Responsorial Psalm: 23:1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6](#)

[Reading II: Ephesians 5:8-14](#)

[Gospel: John 9:1-41](#)

Readings may be found on the US Bishop's website:

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/031923.cfm>



El Greco, 1560

The First Book of Samuel recalls the transition of the people of Israel from being a group of clans into being a nation under a king. Today's selection focuses upon Samuel preparing to anoint the second king for Israel, David. People are not involved in the choice of David. It is God alone who chooses David to be King. This shows that God is the one who has established this office and the nation of Israel.

Samuel goes to the house of Jesse, and Jesse presents several of his sons to Samuel. Samuel thinks the strong or tall one would make a good king. God does not choose them, for God says that divine choice is based on a person's heart, not their appearance. Samuel is blind to the inner person. Samuel asks Jesse if he has any other sons. Jesse replies that there is David, but Jesse had not called him because he was just a youth. Jesse was blind to the qualities of David. God, who knows the qualities of a person, chooses the youngest still in his youth, and Samuel anoints David to be the next king.

Anointing has long been a sign of setting someone apart for a special office or role. Kings and high priests were anointed. God anointed prophets. It offered strength and flexibility. Athletes were anointed during their training. God is strengthening people through religious anointing to fulfill the task or office given to them. Anointing continues to be a sacramental experience in the catechumenate, baptism of infants, confirmation, ordinations, and anointing of the sick.

The gospel passage has two separate levels of instruction taking place. First, there are interactions between the man who was blind and the Pharisees. Secondly, there is the audience for whom John is writing toward the end of the first century. Each is called to face the truth about Jesus.

Seeing is not automatic. Infants must learn to see and make sense of various stimuli. It takes time for adults who recover sight to make sense of all the visual impulses. This is also true for spiritual life. The sight or insight that one gains progresses slowly and needs God's assistance to make sense of the spiritual life.

The narrative presents Jesus healing a blind man by making a mud paste with soil and his saliva. Jesus sends the man to wash in the pool of Siloam (which means sent). With sight given to him, the blind man slowly comes to know Jesus. Throughout the narrative, he progressively uses more meaningful titles to refer to Jesus as he comes to recognize him. He starts by saying, "the man, they call Jesus." The man experiences pressure and confrontation with the Jewish leadership. He then calls him a prophet and a man from God. When Jesus asks him if he believes in "the Son of Man," after he has suffered expulsion from the synagogue, he declares, "I do believe." Faith comes slowly and sometimes only through suffering.

Jesus also caused a split among the Pharisees. Since Jesus had healed the man on the Sabbath, some clung to the law that no work could be done on the Sabbath. Since Jesus did heal, he could not be from God. Others saw the power manifest in the healing and thought, who else but one sent from God could do this? Jesus challenged the long-accepted system with a greater law – the love of neighbor.

There were also teachings for the early Christians contained in the narrative. Washing in the pool and gaining sight were likely connected to baptism, for in baptism, one is enlightened. One has a new spiritual relationship that one did not see before baptism.

The note that the man's parents were afraid because the Jewish leaders had decided to expel Christians from the synagogue did not happen until late in the first century. It was a real threat to the people for whom John wrote. If they were expelled from the synagogue, they would no longer be able to claim the Jewish exemption from emperor worship. People who did not offer worship to the emperor were subject to death. These Christians also faced suffering and had to decide if they believed in the "Son of Man."

The passage from Ephesians compliments the gospel. The second reading during Lent highlights what Christian living means. In Christ, we are "light in the Lord." Our lives should reflect that, with deeds that show forth the work of God within us and in the world around out. We are challenged to live the virtues and renounce the vices so that the reign of God may be seen. The final words are probably from an early baptismal hymn that encouraged the newly baptized to trust that Christ would light the way for them.

Reflection Questions:

When have you tended to make a judgment about a person based on their appearance, size, clothing, or accent?

What are some indicators of the truest nature of a person that can help us to know them truly? There are many forms of blindness in the narrative and in our lives. What are some that you have identified?

Have you experienced resistance to letting go of some of the things that you were taught as a child or by someone whom you respected, as you have matured spiritually?

Where have you been blind to God in your life or in the world around you? How have you gained sight?

What does living in the light mean to you?

How has the light come into your life? Has someone been a source of light in your life? How is the Word of God a light for you?

Themes:

Role of King
Social Sin and evils

Healing
Conversion as a process

Prayer:

For the Church: that we may share the light of the Gospel with all who are struggling to recognize good from evil, truth from lies, and selfless love from self-serving activity

For all the Elect: that God will heal them of the blindness that clouds their vision and give them a new awareness of God's presence in their lives and God's invitation to service

For all whose lives are darkened by alcohol, drugs, abuse, pornography, or greed: that the light of the Gospel may shatter their darkness and open a path to living a new life

For all who face social, cultural, political, or family opposition to embracing the Gospel: that God will strengthen their hearts and help them find loving and supporting