

FIRST READING

1 Sm 16:1, 6-7, 10-13

A reading from the first book of Samuel.

The Lord said to Samuel: "Fill your horn with oil and go. I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem, for I have chosen myself a king among his sons." When Samuel arrived, he caught sight of Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed one stands there before him," but the Lord said to Samuel, "Take no notice of his appearance or his height for I have rejected him; God does not see as man sees; man looks at appearances but the Lord looks at the heart." Jesse presented his seven sons to Samuel, but Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen these." He then asked Jesse, "Are these all the sons you have?" He answered, "There is still one left, the youngest; he is out looking after the sheep." Then Samuel said to Jesse, "Send for him; we will not sit down to eat until he comes." Jesse had him sent for, a boy of fresh complexion, with fine eyes and pleasant bearing. The Lord said, "Come, anoint him, for this is the one." At this, Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him where he stood with his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord seized on David and stayed with him from that day on.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM

Psalm 22 (23)

Response:

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

1. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want. Fresh and green are the pastures where he gives me repose. Near restful waters he leads me, to revive my drooping spirit. **(R.)**
2. He guides me along the right path; he is true to his name. If I should walk in the valley of darkness no evil would I fear. You are there with your crook and your staff; with these you give me comfort. **(R.)**
3. You have prepared a banquet for me in the sight of my foes. My head you have anointed with oil; my cup is overflowing. **(R.)**
4. Surely goodness and kindness shall follow me all the days of my life. In the Lord's own house shall I dwell for ever and ever. **(R.)**

SECOND READING

Eph 5:8-14

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Ephesians.

You were darkness once, but now you are light in the Lord; be like children of light, for the effects of the light are seen in complete goodness and right living and truth. Try to discover what the Lord wants of you, having nothing to do with the futile works of darkness but exposing them by contrast. The things which are done in secret are things that people are ashamed even to speak of; but anything exposed by the light will be illuminated and anything illuminated turns into light. That is why it is said:

Wake up from your sleep, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Glory to you, O Christ, you are the Word of God!

I am the light of the world, says the Lord; anyone who follows me will have the light of life.

Glory to you, O Christ, you are the Word of God!

GOSPEL

Jn 9:1-41

(For shorter form John 9:1, 6-9, 13-17, 34-38 read between >>)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John.

>As Jesus went along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. < His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, for him to have been born blind?" "Neither he nor his parents sinned," Jesus answered "he was born blind so that the works of God might be displayed in him.

"As long as the day lasts

I must carry out the work of the one who sent me; the night will soon be here when no one can work.

As long as I am in the world

I am the light of the world."

Having said this, >he spat on the ground, made a paste with the spittle, put this over the eyes of the blind man, and said to him, "Go and wash in the Pool of Siloam (a name that means "sent"). So the blind man went off and washed himself, and came away with his sight restored. His

neighbours and people who earlier had seen him begging said, "Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?" Some said, "Yes, it is the same one." Others said, "No, he only looks like him." The man himself said, "I am the man." < So they said to him, "Then how do your eyes come to be open?" "The man called Jesus" he answered "made a paste, daubed my eyes with it and said to me, 'Go and wash at Siloam'; so I went, and when I washed I could see." They asked, "Where is he?" "I don't know" he answered.

>They brought the man who had been blind to the Pharisees. It had been a Sabbath day when Jesus made the paste and opened the man's eyes, so when the Pharisees asked him how he had come to see, he said, "He put a paste on my eyes, and I washed, and I can see." Then some of the Pharisees said, "This man cannot be from God: he does not keep the sabbath."

Others said, "How could a sinner produce signs like this?" And there was disagreement among them. So they spoke to the blind man again, "What have you to say about him yourself, now that he has opened your eyes?" "He is a prophet" replied the man. < However, the Jews would not believe that the man had been blind and had gained his sight, without first sending for his parents and asking them, "Is this man really your son who you say was born blind? If so, how is it that he is now able to see?" His parents answered, "We know he is our son and we know he was born blind, but we don't know how it is that he can see now, or who opened his eyes. He is old enough: let him speak for himself." His parents spoke like this out of fear of the Jews, who had already agreed to expel from the synagogue anyone who should acknowledge Jesus as the Christ. This was why his parents said, "He is old enough; ask him." So the Jews again sent for the man and said to him, "Give glory to God! For our part, we know that this man is a sinner." The man answered, "I don't know if he is a sinner; I only know that I was blind and now I can see." They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" He replied, "I have told you once and you wouldn't listen. Why do you want to hear it

all again? Do you want to become his disciples too?" At this they hurled abuse at him: "You can be his disciple," they said "we are disciples of Moses: we know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this man, we don't know where he comes from." The man replied, "Now here is an astonishing thing! He has opened my eyes, and you don't know where he comes from! We know that God doesn't listen to sinners, but God does listen to men who are devout and do his will. Ever since the world began it is unheard of for anyone to open the eyes of a man who was born blind; if this man were not from God, he couldn't do a thing." >"Are you trying to teach us," they replied "and you a sinner through and through, since you were born!" And they drove him away. Jesus heard they had driven him away, and when he found him he said to him, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" "Sir," the man replied "tell me who he is so that I may believe in him." Jesus said, "You are looking at him; he is speaking to you." The man said, "Lord, I believe," and worshipped him. < Jesus said: "It is for judgement that I have come into this world,

so that those without sight may see and those with sight turn blind."

Hearing this, some Pharisees who were present said to him,

"We are not blind, surely?"

Jesus replied: "Blind? If you were, you would not be guilty,

but since you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains."

>The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.<

PROFESSION OF FAITH

I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,

(all bow during the next two lines)

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; he descended into hell; on the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty; from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

We place before you with joy these offerings, which bring eternal remedy, O Lord, praying that we may both faithfully revere them and present them to you, as is fitting, for the salvation of all the world. Through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

The Lord anointed my eyes: I went, I washed, I saw and I believed in God.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

O God, who enlighten everyone who comes into this world, illuminate our hearts, we pray, with the splendour of your grace, that we may always ponder what is worthy and pleasing to your majesty and love you in all sincerity. Through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Sunday Message

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT (LAETARE)

THE WORD

Year A • 15 March 2026 • Colour: Rose or Violet • Psalter Week 4



Today's Gospel tells the wonderful story of a man born blind who becomes a powerful witness to Jesus.

The blind man trusts Jesus enough to allow him to put mud in his eyes; then he obeys Jesus' instructions to wash in the Pool of Siloam. And the man is cured – he is able to see. In the long conversations that follow, first with his neighbours and then with the Pharisees, the man born blind comes to see more and more clearly who Jesus is, and to lead others to faith. He moves from not knowing Jesus, to recognising him as a prophet, to seeing him as a man of God, then as the Son of Man, and finally to acknowledging him as Lord.

His journey of faith goes from blindness of eyes and heart to being able to see not only with his eyes but also with his heart. ■

PRAY

Pray especially for young people who lack self-esteem and find it hard to see their God-given beauty and potential.

LEARN

The Christian is someone who leads others to Jesus

Jesus is the light of the world

We are called to see ourselves and others the way God sees us

DO

Lent is a time when we are invited to become aware of our blind spots. Examine your life, your relationships, your values, your attitudes. Look for your blind spots. Ask the Lord to heal you, as he healed the man born blind.

SAY

“Lord, I thank you for the gift of faith. Help me to see as you see. Amen.”

REFLECT

The first reading describes how David, a young shepherd boy, is anointed king of Israel. God instructs the prophet Samuel to visit the home of Jesse, for God has chosen a king from among his sons. Samuel was certain that Eliab, the first born, was the one God had selected. After all, traditionally the oldest is recognised as leader. Of all eight sons, David would have been considered the one least likely to be selected. He was the youngest, a boy of fresh complexion, the least experienced, but God instructs Samuel not to judge by appearances but as God does, by looking into the heart. Humans look at appearances but God looks beyond appearances, at what really counts.

We can only imagine how shocked Jesse and his family must have been at this extraordinary turn of events - that God had personally selected one of his own sons to be king of Israel and that the one selected was the last one they would have considered.

This story offers an invaluable lesson we should take to heart. We must not judge by appearances, but try to see ourselves and others with God's eyes, try to see the potential and the good in every person.

Life today, especially for younger people, is harder than when I was growing up in the 1970s. There was no internet back then, no social media. We hadn't to worry about online bullying or how we looked on Instagram or TikTok. Young women weren't inundated daily with hundreds of images of stick-thin barbie lookalikes, all conforming to unrealistic beauty standards today's girls are told they must aspire to. Andrew Tate wasn't around to preach his message of toxic masculinity, encouraging boys to treat girls as objects.

The pressure today to be successful, with a rewarding career and a big income and a perfect family and a nice house, is huge. Social media, with its obsession with looks

and money and celebrity, makes self-love even harder.

And this pressure costs. It damages self-esteem. We compare ourselves with others and think we don't measure up, that we're lacking, even that we're failures. It has other negative effects - like self-harm, eating disorders, addiction, depression.

It's hard on young women. In her book about her battle with anorexia called *Good Girls*, Hadley Freeman writes: “We see the impossible standards set for women: be smart but not ambitious; look perfect but don't be vain; don't age but don't get plastic surgery; be slim but don't be obsessed with diets; be smart but not smarter than the men around you; be pleasing and have no needs of your own. This is the nonsense women have to put up with.”

She's right. Women shouldn't have to put up with it.

It's hard on young men, too. They're told that to succeed, they must be brash, buff, tough, never soft or sentimental, that women exist for their pleasure. The blogs and websites that make up what's called the mansphere tell them masculinity is all about being active: doing, achieving, overpowering, being dominant, while femininity is all about being passive: being judged, being an object, being small, smaller the better. This is enormously damaging to many young men.

Of course, we don't all have the same talents, opportunities, or looks, but we're all gifted, each of us unique, precious, irreplaceable, and the only thing that matters is seeing ourselves the way God sees us and loving ourselves the way God loves us. God saw all God had made and found it very good - and that includes every one of us. We must see the beauty, the gifts we have in abundance, and appreciate them, use them well. We need to look beyond appearances, as God does, to what truly counts. ■