

Fourth Sunday of Lent, March 19, 2023

Our Lady of Perpetual Help

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

1The LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul, seeing I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons." ... 6When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD'S anointed is before him." 7But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart." ... 10And Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen these." 11And Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but behold, he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and fetch him; for we will not sit down till he comes here." 12And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. And the LORD said, "Arise, anoint him; for this is he." 13 Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. And Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah.

Responsorial Psalm PS 23: 1-3A, 3B-4, 5, 6.

R. (1) The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. beside restful waters he leads me; he refreshes my soul.

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

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.

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

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

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

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.

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

Second Reading — Ephesians 5:8-14

8 For once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), 10and try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. 11Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. 12For it is a shame even to speak of the things that they do in secret; 13but when anything is exposed by the light it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. 14Therefore it is said, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light."

Gospel Reading — John 9:1-41

1 As he passed by, he saw a man blind from his birth. 2And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" 3Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him. 4We must work the works of him who sent me, while it is day; night comes, when no one can work. 5As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." 6As he said this, he spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle and anointed the man's eyes with the clay, 7saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing. 8 The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar, said, "Is not this the man who used to sit and beg?" 9 Some said, "It is he"; others said, "No, but he is like him." He said, "I am the man." 10 They said to him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" 11He answered, "The man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash'; so I went and washed and received my sight." 12They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know." 13They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. 14Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. 15The Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, "He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see." 16 Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" There was a division among them.

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17So they again said to the blind man, "What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet."

18The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight, 19and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" 20His parents

answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; 21but how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age, he will speak for himself." 22 His parents said this because they feared the Jews, for the

Jews had already agreed that if any one should confess him to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue. 23Therefore his parents said, "He is of age, ask him." 24So for the 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." 25He answered, "Whether he is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see." 26They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he

open your eyes?" 27He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you too want to become his disciples?"

28And they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. 29 We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." 30The man answered, "Why,

this is a marvel! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. 31

We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if any one is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. 32Never

since the world began has it been heard that any one opened the eyes of a man born

blind. 33If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." 34 They answered him,

"You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?" And they cast him out.

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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God...

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

Many of us know people who have become either completely or partially blind due to accident or disease. Few of us know blind people who have received the ability to see for the first time. In both cases, the contrast between darkness and light is startling. Light opens to us a world of possibilities, freedom of movement, and an ability to comprehend our world. Darkness, on the other hand, limits our options, restricts our freedom to move around freely, and obscures our world. All of us realize that we live in a real, concrete, physical world, but are we equally aware that we concurrently live in a real spiritual world? One reality we can see, hear, and feel; the other is more elusive to our comprehension, however, its effects can be readily recognized. Some of us see well in the earthly realm, even with 20/20 vision, but in the realm of the Spirit we are practically blind. Which is the worst tragedy, to be physically blind, or to be spiritually blind? Like Samuel in this week's first reading, it is easy for us to mistakenly make spiritual judgments based on physical appearances. This is unfortunate, for one's physical appearance, good looks, charismatic personality, and fashionable bearing can often mask a person's less attractive spiritual condition. To primarily view people on outward appearances is a form of spiritual blindness which we should abandon. The Lord, on the other hand, looks through people's outward shell to view the spiritual quality of their inner life. This kind of spiritual vision and insight must come from the Lord, and from having our mind transformed to think in light of the truths of sacred Scripture and the values found in the Word of God. Fanny Crosby, the prolific Christian hymn writer, lost her physical sight as a young child. However, it is obvious through her hymns that she was a person who could wonderfully see with the spiritual eyes of her heart. We get a glimpse of her spiritual insight in the following poem: "Oh, what a happy soul am I! Although I cannot see, I am resolved that in this world, contented I will be. How many blessings I enjoy that other people don't, To weep and sigh because I'm blind, I cannot and I won't." Like the blind man in this week's Gospel reading, there is no shame in recognizing our blindness, rather there is wisdom in doing so. For only when we recognize our blindness can we appeal to Jesus for healing and new sight. Jesus stands ready to make the "sightless see." The only question is, are we ready to admit our need, believe that he does and will give us spiritual insight, and ask him for healing?

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

First Reading —

1. Explain what it means to be blind spiritually and to see spiritually.
2. How can we, like Samuel, avoid the mistake of judging people on their outward appearance?

Second Reading —

3. Contrast the options for living expressed in this passage, that are available for every Christian.
4. Why should someone choose living life in the light over living life in the darkness?

Fourth Sunday of Lent, March 19, 2023

Our Lady of Perpetual Help

Gospel Reading —

5. With whom do you most identify in this story?
6. How do you think one feels who is spiritually blind?
7. What are the various ways people can respond when confronted with a work of Christ in another's life?
8. What truths did Jesus reveal about spiritual blindness?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with a final prayer.