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1 Samuel 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a
Psalm 23
Ephesians 5:8-14
John 9:1-41
Fourth Sunday of Lent
March 15, 2026

In last Sunday's readings, we heard images of water described in ways that revealed God to unbelieving people. Remember Moses striking the rock at Horeb with his staff, and God making water flow from that rock so people who were thirsty and grumbling could drink? Remember a thirsty Jesus asking the Samaritan woman at the well for water to drink, and then offering her living water to satisfy her thirst for eternal life? Today's readings describe images of light – light that enabled Samuel to see as God sees; light that brought the Ephesians out of the darkness of unbelief; and light that brought both vision and faith to the man born blind.

The power of light is easy to underestimate. Light not only brightens our surroundings, it promotes growth through photosynthesis, it powers machinery through photovoltaic cells, it transmits information through fiberoptic cables, it produces heat that can remove tumors and cut steel with precision, and in a more figurative sense, light opens our minds. That last one may very well be the most powerful of all functions of light. But let's begin simply. I think it is safe to say that we have all experienced times in our lives when we feared darkness, only to be relieved when we saw light. As a youngster, I was occasionally asked to walk out at night from our house into a darkened area of our farm to close a gate, shut off water, or perform some other

simple task. The walk into darkness was always filled with trepidation. My imagination would go wild with thoughts of skunks, snakes, and other critters that could do me harm. But once my task was finished, and I turned around to see light from the house, I was fearless. The walk back, over the same route but toward light, was a piece of cake.

Now, let's consider how seeing light figuratively can be a powerful force that opens our minds. It has happened many times in my life. Perhaps the most memorable was during deacon formation. Our classes were held in primitive surroundings on the Sid Richardson Scout Ranch in Wise County. To get there each weekend we drove up U.S. 287 past Decatur, and then out U.S. 380 past Bridgeport, to what appeared to be the end of civilization. Then we drove ten miles further on a dirt road. Our group was about evenly divided between Spanish-speaking and English-speaking candidates. We attended classes separately but came together for meals and other social functions. Few of us were bilingual, so communication across the language barrier was limited to gestures and a few simple words. But one day we were combined into small groups for reflection. Each group had an interpreter, and we were asked to tell our stories and share a few spiritual insights. One of the Spanish-speaking men in my group was Eduardo. He spoke little

English, and I spoke even less Spanish, so we knew very little about each other until that small-group session. What I learned about Eduardo through our interpreter opened my eyes and my mind. First, Eduardo shared that he had come into the United States from Mexico to work and to survive. But he was undocumented and had been apprehended and sent back to Mexico twice before he was finally allowed to stay. He subsequently found work, married, and was raising a family in a small west Texas town. Hearing Eduardo describe some of the language mishaps, cultural challenges, and prejudices that he had experienced reminded me of my own grandfather's stories from when he emigrated to the United States from Europe in 1889. Then, through the interpreter, Eduardo began to share some spiritual reflections, and I was blown away. This man knew God! And he helped me come to know God better. It occurred to me that had I met Eduardo at a different time and under different circumstances I might have considered him illegal. I might have even labeled him a wetback whose only contribution to society was to pick cotton. But in that session, I saw light. Eduardo was obviously created in the image and likeness of God, and he had much to offer. Unfortunately, he did not make it to ordination. Having had little formal education, Eduardo struggled with the reading and writing requirements of our formation. Wherever he is today, however, I am confident that Eduardo is a valued and respected member of his community and his parish.

Jesus' healing of the man born blind is the fifth of seven "signs" recorded in John's Gospel. We call them miracles. John calls them signs. Like many of the

prejudices we hold against people we don't really know, this Gospel story reflects a common, yet incorrect, belief that physical afflictions result from sin. That line of thinking persists even to this day. Who hasn't heard, "God is punishing you." as an explanation for some misfortune? Or conversely, who hasn't seen an athlete point upward after a good play as if to thank God for favoring him over his opponents? Even Jesus' disciples asked, "...who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus was quick to answer, "Neither he nor his parents sinned." Jesus was interested in healing the man, not assessing blame for his affliction. And heal the man Jesus did, giving him physical sight as well as spiritual insight. Consequently, the man born blind "saw light" in more ways than one.

Heal rather than blame.
Understand rather than condemn.
Welcome rather than reject. That is what Jesus did; it is what he taught; and it is what we are called to do as followers of Jesus. It is not easy in a culture as fractured and confrontational as ours. But it is possible. One of many who is living proof is Father Greg Boyle, the Jesuit priest who founded Homeboy Industries, the largest and most successful gang interdiction program in the world. Homeboy Industries employs former gang members in the Los Angeles area who are known as "homies." Father Boyle has helped thousands of "homies" leave the destructive lifestyle of gangs, not by judging or rebuking them, but by loving them and giving them hope. The title of his latest book says a lot about Father Boyle, *Forgive Everyone Everything*. In a world where many of us see only darkness, Father Boyle sees light. And he

sees each of his “homies” as God sees them – as children of light.