

## PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

### FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT – YEAR A

The fourth Sunday in Lent is often referred to as *Laetare Sunday* ('Rejoice Sunday'). Its name derives from the opening words of the old Latin Introit for the Mass of the day: 'Laetare Jerusalem' ('Rejoice, O Jerusalem': see Isaiah 66:10). We have now reached the mid-point of Lent, when traditional Lenten austerity is relaxed for a while on this Sunday, as we look forward towards Easter with great hope.

#### Second Reading Ephesians 5: 8–14

Ephesus, home of the Ephesians, was a large seaport on the Western coast of Asia Minor where the apostle Paul spent three years. He used this town as his base during his third missionary journey.

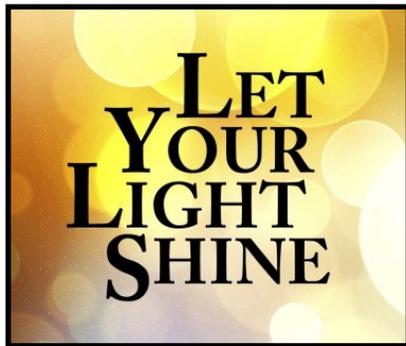
His letter to the Ephesians was written while the author was in prison.

It is addressed to people living in communities of diverse origins, worshipping many different deities, where Christians will have been a minority.

Contemporary Christians will recognise parallels with their own situations.

This week's passage comes from the second part of the letter, which looks at Christian life and gives general principles for spiritual renewal through love and care for others.

The final quotation, 'Wake up from your sleep', is believed to have been an ancient hymn, probably used in a baptismal liturgy.



The imagery of light and darkness in this passage is a good introduction to today's Gospel, which centres around the curing of a blind man. Christ, the anointed one (see First Reading: 1 Samuel 16), is recognised as the light of the world.



## Gospel John 9: 1–41

Chapter 9 is often thought to be the most dramatic portion of John's Gospel. It is part of the section referred to by scholars as the 'Book of Signs' (John 1: 19 to 12: 50), which can be divided into seven 'episodes' (the wedding at Cana; the healing of the official's son; the curing of a lame man; the feeding of the 5,000; Jesus and Peter walking on water; the curing of the man born blind; and the resurrection of Lazarus). The story of the man born blind begins Episode 6: Light of the World (sight and blindness). It is linked to the story of the good shepherd and the Jewish feast of Hanukkah.

#### As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

This is one of two miracles in which Jesus uses spittle (the other is in Mark 7: 33). In the ancient world this was quite common: the spittle of a distinguished person was thought to hold curative properties. Jesus took and used the familiar methods and customs of his time .

#### The pool of Siloam.

This was the place where the conduit from the 'Virgin's Fountain' (the Gihon Spring) emerged into the city. As a result, the pool was given the name Siloam, meaning 'sent': reflecting how the water was 'sent' through the conduit into the city. The pool was one of the landmarks of Jerusalem; a result of one of the great engineering feats of the ancient world.

In John's gospel Jesus often refers to himself as having been 'sent'; there are ten occurrences of this in Chapters 7 and 8.

#### And you a sinner through and through since you were born.

This is the only healing in the Gospels in which the sufferer is said to have been afflicted from the time of his birth.

The Jews connected suffering with sin, and even the idea of pre-natal sin was not unknown. At the time of Jesus the Jews believed in the pre-existence of the soul, the idea coming from Plato and the Greeks. The thought of the sins of the parents being visited on their children is woven into the Old Testament: Exodus 20: 5 and 34: 7, Numbers 14: 18 and also Psalm 109: 14 and Isaiah 65:7. Jesus tells his disciples that neither the man nor his parents have sinned.

#### Physical and spiritual blindness.

Although this man's physical healing was instantaneous, his spiritual progress was gradual.

The fact that he was anointed and washed is symbolic of baptism, and this story is sometimes used for Baptismal instruction.

The stages of belief that the blind man went through can be likened to the stages of catechumens in instruction as they advance to a deeper spiritual understanding and insight.