

## 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent

### 1 Samuel 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a

*Samuel, the Prophet, was also the last of the judges. The people insisted on having a king so although they were warned by God, they had their king but Saul didn't work out too well. Then God told Samuel to anoint young David as the heir to the failed reign of Saul.*<sup>14</sup>

<sup>1b</sup>The Lord said to Samuel: "Fill your horn with oil, and be on your way. I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem, for I have chosen my king from among his sons." The choice of David before his brothers, who were all older, serves to underline the freedom of the *divine election*.<sup>2</sup> Note that David does not in any way merit his election: he is a nobody, from a family of no importance. No genealogy is provided, apart from the name of Jesse, his father. He is the youngest of his brothers and, like the rest of his family, he works as a shepherd. He doesn't come from a noble or military or priestly family. He could have no claim to be anointed king. David is a type of those who in the Christian tradition are called to offices in the Church: what matters is not background, personal qualities or material resources but the realization that one is called by God.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>6</sup>As Jesse and his sons came to the sacrifice, Samuel looked at Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is here before him."

<sup>7</sup>But the Lord said to Samuel: "Do not judge from his appearance or from his lofty stature, because I have rejected him. Not as man sees does God see, because man sees the appearance but the Lord looks into the heart." From this derives the requirement to live and act in keeping with the call one is given.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup>In the same way Jesse presented seven sons before Samuel, but Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen any one of these."

<sup>11</sup>Then Samuel asked Jesse, "Are these all the sons you have?" Jesse replied, "There is still the youngest, who is tending the sheep." Samuel said to Jesse, "Send for him; we will not begin the sacrificial banquet until he arrives here."

<sup>12</sup>Jesse sent and had the young man brought to them. He was ruddy, a youth handsome to behold and making a splendid appearance. While Saul was remarkably tall, David was short, light, "comely," had red hair and blue eyes; was strong, and swift of foot.<sup>5</sup> The Lord said, "There--anoint him, for this is the one!" David had guts that came not from self-confidence, but from a matter-of-fact trust in Yahweh.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>13</sup>Then Samuel, with the horn of oil in hand, anointed David in the presence of his Brothers; Anointing with oil signified conferring Yahweh's power and authority.<sup>4</sup> and from that day on, the spirit of the Lord rushed upon David. This whole story shows that the choice was God's and not man's. Man's choice would have been the firstborn. In order to emphasize the authority behind this anointing, David is anointed with all his brothers as witnesses so no one can say "I didn't know."

14

### Ephesians 5:8-14

*Ephesus was in Western Asia Minor. It possessed the famous Temple of Diana, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, and was a center of magical practice. The Church was established there early and was visited by St. Paul. It is the place where St. John is reputed to have written his gospel, and he may also have been buried there. An impressive basilica was built over his supposed tomb. According to one tradition, the assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary occurred on a hill near the city. Early in the 14<sup>th</sup> century A.D. it was occupied by the Turks and all that remains now is a small village called Selcuk which is located near the extensive ruins of the ancient*

city.<sup>14</sup> *This reading emphasizes clearly that the preparation of a person coming to the faith involves moral formation as well as information about the faith.*

**Brothers and sisters:**

**8You were once darkness, but now you are light** Paul reminds us that the light is not just around us but is also within us. Like a light bulb, we can either be dark or brightly lit. The difference is determined by whether the power of God is at work in us. Once we have been united with Christ, we are given the power to be the light of the world.<sup>7</sup> **in the Lord. Live as children of light,** In contrast to the Christian's previous situation, which St. Paul describes as "darkness", once baptized, he has a new way of thinking: he is a "child of light."<sup>6</sup> There is not, as some heretics argue, a nature so alienated that it cannot receive salvation. Those who receive salvation — the righteous — are the light of the world (Mt 5:14.) Those who refuse, the unrighteous, are in consequence called darkness. The difference and distance between one and the other is clearly seen by their own fruits.<sup>14</sup>

**9for light produces every kind of goodness and righteousness and truth.** The Christian has a new way of being and thinking and acting, and is an example and a help to those around him.<sup>6</sup>

**10Try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.** A person who is in love tries to discover what the loved one likes. If one is to offer God actions, which are pleasing to him, one needs to have a good grasp of his commandments, of Christian doctrine and moral teaching. A first sign of the sincerity of a person's love of God is the effort he makes to obtain good spiritual and doctrinal training; that shows that he is at least making an effort in the right direction.<sup>6</sup>

**11Take no part in the fruitless works of darkness;** Some of these "fruitless works of darkness", that is, actions that lack substance or worth,<sup>14</sup> are mentioned in Galatians 5:19-21: lewd conduct, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hostilities, bickering, jealousy, outbursts of rage, selfish rivalries, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and the like. **rather expose them,** St. Ignatius says that the devil will always tempt us to keep our sins secret. He may tempt us to think that a grave sin is too insignificant to confess or he may tempt us to think that even a slight sin is too horrible to confess. Sins that go unconfessed tend to grow in us.<sup>1</sup>

**12for it is shameful even to mention the things done by them in secret;**

**13but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that becomes**

**visible is light.** The very light that we shine on our sins in confessing them purifies us and turns us away from sin.<sup>1</sup>

**14Therefore, it says: "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will**

**give you light."** This is probably a quote from an ancient baptismal hymn. It challenges the one to be baptized to wake up from the sleep of a spiritual death and to arise from among the spiritually dead. Resurrection is conceived here as entry into newness of life, permeated by the light of Christ.<sup>8</sup>

### **John 9: 1-41**

*We can deduce that our reading for today takes place in or very close to Jerusalem, probably in October or November of the year prior to his passion. This reading contrasts Jesus (the light of the world) with the Pharisees (blindness).<sup>14</sup>*

**1As Jesus passed by he saw a man blind from birth.** John often uses a nameless character to represent every Christian. The blind man represents each of us.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup>His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” The light that Jesus has come to give is not men’s by right, but is God’s free gift through Jesus Christ: By nature, man is, in this sense, born blind.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Jesus answered, “Neither he nor his parents sinned; it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him. The man’s blindness was part of the providential plan of God. Giving physical sight to the blind is a sign that Jesus gives us spiritual sight to see earth in light of heaven, time in light of eternity, and our lives in light of our destiny.<sup>9</sup> It was a firm Jewish belief that every affliction was a punishment for sin, and that the sins of the parents could be punished in their offspring. The disciples did not necessarily think that the man might have sinned before birth—in the foreknowledge of God, the punishment might have been inflicted for a sin that was to follow.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>4</sup>We have to do the works of the one who sent me By using the plural, John wants to remind his readers that theirs is also the duty to do the works of God.<sup>2</sup> while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work. The “day” refers to Jesus’ life on earth. “Night” refers to his death. This “night” can also be understood as referring to the end of the world in which case it means that the Redemption of men brought about by Christ needs to be continued by the Church throughout the centuries.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>5</sup>While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” Jesus is the source of all truth, faith and life.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup>When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva, Saliva was thought to have medicinal purposes.<sup>2</sup> and smeared The verb used literally means “anointed.” Anointing was part of the ritual of baptism from earliest Christian times.<sup>2</sup> the clay on his eyes, In the sacraments Christ continues to “touch” us in order to heal us.<sup>12</sup> (CCC 1504) It was St. Augustine who saw in the making of the mud paste a metaphor for the Incarnation: the divine power mixing with the earth, resulting in the formation of a healing balm. When this salve of God made flesh is rubbed onto our eyes blinded by sin we come again to see.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>7</sup>and said to him, “Go wash in the Pool of Siloam”—which means Sent. This pool is a symbol of Jesus, the source of living water and the One sent by his Father. Its contents are symbolic of the Spirit, who is the living water poured out by Christ.<sup>9</sup> So he went and washed, and came back able to see. The miracle anticipates the administration of Baptism, where catechumens are washed in water, anointed with oil, and enlightened with grace and truth.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup>His neighbors and those who had seen him earlier as a beggar said, “Isn’t this the one who used to sit and beg?”

<sup>9</sup>Some said, “It is,” but others said, “No, he just looks like him.” He said, “I am.”

<sup>10</sup>So they said to him, “How were your eyes opened?”

<sup>11</sup>He replied, “The man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and told me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ So I went there and washed and was able to see.”

<sup>12</sup>And they said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I don’t know.”

<sup>13</sup>They brought the one who was born blind to the Pharisees.

<sup>14</sup>Now Jesus had made clay and opened his eyes on a Sabbath. Jesus often taught that observance of the law of Sabbath rest was compatible with the duty to do good. Charity, the good of others, takes precedence.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>15</sup>So then the Pharisees also asked him how he was able to see. He said to them, “He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and now I can see.”

<sup>16</sup>So some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, because he does not keep the Sabbath.” But others said, “How can a sinful man do such signs?” And there was a division among them. Their reasoning was that Jesus sinned by healing on the Sabbath. They believed that no sinner

could work a miracle. That left them with two options: either Jesus was not a sinner or he did not perform a miracle.<sup>1</sup>

17So they said to the blind man again, “What do you have to say about him, since he opened your eyes?” He said, “He is a prophet.” The perception of Jesus deepens as the story unfolds: he was a “man” in verse 11, here he is a “prophet,” in verse 33 he is “from God” and by verse 38 he is the “Lord” worthy of worship.<sup>9</sup>

18Now the Jews did not believe that he had been blind and gained his sight until they summoned the parents of the one who had gained his sight.

19They asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How does he now see?” The testimony of the parents would have been the most credible of all sources since they would have known him from birth.<sup>9</sup>

20His parents answered and said, “We know that this is our son and that he was born blind.

21We do not know how he sees now, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him, he is of age; he can speak for himself.”

22His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone acknowledged him as the Christ, he would be expelled from the synagogue. This meant excommunication from the fellowship and worship of the Jews.<sup>9</sup> Such a person was cursed in the presence of the people and he was cut off from God and from man. This could be either temporary or permanent.<sup>10</sup>

23For this reason his parents said, “He is of age; question him.”

24So a second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, “Give God the praise! This was an oath formula that bound the witness to speak the truth.<sup>9</sup> By telling the truth, the man would indeed be giving the glory to God that the Jews were denying him!<sup>2</sup> We know that this man is a sinner.” Jesus broke the Sabbath law in three ways: By making clay he was guilty of working on the Sabbath, it was forbidden to heal on the Sabbath, and it was not lawful to put fasting spittle on the eyelids.<sup>10</sup>

25He replied, “If he is a sinner, I do not know. One thing I do know is that I was blind and now I see.”

26So they said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?”

27He answered them, “I told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?” By his accent on the “too” he reminds the Jews of the unpleasant fact that Jesus is gathering disciples despite their efforts.<sup>14</sup>

28They ridiculed him and said, “You are that man’s disciple; we are disciples of Moses!

29We know that God spoke to Moses, but we do not know where this one is from.”

30The man answered and said to them, “This is what is so amazing, that you do not know where he is from, yet he opened my eyes.

31We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if one is devout and does his will, he listens to him.

32It is unheard of that anyone ever opened the eyes of a person born blind. Even Tobit, whose eyesight was temporarily lost and later restored, was not blind from birth.<sup>9</sup>

33If this man were not from god, he would not be able to do anything.”

34They answered and said to him, “You were born totally in sin, and are you trying to teach us?” Then they threw him out.

35When Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, he found him Jesus is always true to the man who is true to him.<sup>10</sup> and said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” This is a messianic title that occurred 70 times in the synoptic gospels and 12 times in John. It is based on a title used in Daniel

where “one like a man” appears on the clouds before the Ancient of Days and receives a kingdom. The title is used ONLY BY JESUS.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>36</sup>He answered and said, “Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?”

<sup>37</sup>Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, the one speaking with you is he.” Origen of Alexandria remarked that holiness is seeing with the eyes of Christ. St. Thomas Aquinas said that the ultimate goal of the Christian life is a “beatific vision,” an act of seeing.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>38</sup>He said, “I do believe, Lord,” and he worshiped him. The man bowed down before Jesus.

<sup>39</sup>Then Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see might see, and those who do see might become blind.” To the humble and childlike, Jesus reveals the Father and his will, but to the ones who think they are wise and have understanding, he withholds the light necessary to see the truth. The Pharisees fall into the latter category because, while they claim to see clearly, they are blind to their deepest spiritual needs.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>40</sup>Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not also blind, are we?”

<sup>41</sup>Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you are saying, ‘We see,’ so your sin remains.” If only they realized the extent of their own blindness, there would be hope that they would seek for light. What makes their case hopeless is their smug complacency.<sup>2</sup> The sin that is not forgiven is the sin that is not confessed... Catholics are obliged to confess serious sins at least once a year and anyone who is aware of having committed a mortal sin must not receive Holy Communion without having first received sacramental confession.<sup>12</sup> (CCC 1457)

*Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) The Commentary Notes of Tim Gray and Sean Innerst, (2) “The Jerome Biblical Commentary,” (3) “Dictionary of the Bible” by John L. McKenzie, S.J., (4) “The Story of Stories” by Karen Lee-Thorp, (5) “Smith’s Bible Dictionary,” by Dr. William Smith, (6) “The Navarre Bible: Captivity Epistles,” (7) “Workbook for lecturers and gospel readers” by Lawrence E. Mick, (8) “The Collegeville Bible Commentary: Ephesians,” by Ivan Havener, O.S.B., (9) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible; The Gospel of John,” (10) “The Gospel of John” by William Barclay, (11) “The Navarre Bible: St. John,” (12) “The Catechism of the Catholic Church,” (13) “And Now I See...” by Robert Barron, (14) The St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology Online by Dr. Scott Hahn, and (15) “The Navarre Bible: Joshua — Kings”.*

*In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.*