

**March 26, 2017**

**Fourth Sunday of Lent**

*[31] 1 Samuel 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a / Psalm 23: 1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6 / 2 Ephesians 5:8-14 / John 9:1-41*

The first reading emphasizes both the sovereignty of God and how he often uses the least likely instruments to fulfill his will. The backdrop is the divine disfavor that has fallen upon King Saul. God reveals to the prophet Samuel that one of Jesse of Bethlehem's sons will be anointed the new king. Seven men pass before him and the prophet thinks, "Surely the LORD's anointed is here before him." He is impressed but then astonished that God has not selected any of them. As it is, the youngest son who is tending the sheep is the one appointed by God. Surprising everyone, even his brothers, David is anointed king. He might not look like much, but God can see beyond appearances. We are told that God knows the truth about human hearts.

We also need humility as we seek to live out our discipleship. God often surprises his children. We can be easily fooled. Indeed, sometimes we even deceive ourselves. But nothing is hidden from God. Our posture as believers should always be one of abiding trust in God and receptivity to the truth. This openness disposes us to the movement of God's Spirit, just as it rushed upon the boy-king. God will empower those he has chosen.

The responsorial is the 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm so familiar from funeral liturgies. The connections with the first reading are the themes of "shepherd" and how God "guides" our path. God selects the shepherd-boy David to lead his people. Jesus is the good shepherd of the Church. We have confidence that God will not lead us wrong and are urged to cast off fear. God will always be there for us. He gives us what we need. Every life will experience dark times, but God will lead us by his light.

The contrast between light and darkness is developed in the second reading. The spiritual meaning flows from the natural reckoning. We need light to see. Darkness blinds us. It is impossible to travel in the darkness. One cannot read in the darkness. Light helps to guide our footsteps. Light is synonymous with the truth. Light is also connected with righteousness. Sins are hidden in the darkness. Ignorance lives in the darkness. Walking in the "light of the Lord" means following the path placed before us. It also means that we are repentant and forgiven. There is no secret sin that plagues us. There is no lie or rebellion that can escape the divine vision. The truth will be exposed. The children of light are not only led by the LIGHT of Christ, this LIGHT is also alive in them. We become a people set afire or a LIGHT to the world around us. Light is also immediately associated with LIFE. Note that in the morning we open our eyes to a bright new day. At night we close our eyes, sometimes with the prayer that God will protect us and allow us to see another day. The darkness is immediately associated with death. The children of light have a share in the risen life of Christ.

The gospel verse says it all, "I am the light of the world, says the Lord; whoever follows me will have the light of life." Jesus encounters a blind man in the Gospel selection. It is assumed that his affliction is punishment for sin, either that of the man or of his family. Jesus rebukes this view and says that it was "so that the works of God might be made visible through him." Again emphasizing providence, God will show his light and power in the midst of human darkness and

weakness. He will bring light to this man's eyes; but more important, he has come to bring light to the darkness of men's lives. This darkness is ignorance, fear, suffering, sin and death. His light is truth, courage, healing, forgiveness and life. Our Lord places spittle and clay in the man's eyes and tells him to wash. He returns with his sight. All who know the beggar are shocked and in disbelief. He is made to recount his story again and again. The Pharisees interrogate him about it. Instead of acknowledging the miracle and rejoicing that this poor man has been healed, they mock Christ and deny the divine intervention. Despite the attacks, the healed man reckons that the miracle speaks for itself. If Jesus is not a prophet or from God, then how could he have given him his sight? The light of sight is contrasted with the darkness of spiritual blindness that afflicts the Pharisees. They absolutely refuse to see the truth. They will not "open [their] eyes." The dialogue with the healed man touches upon this irony. They speak of having received their authority from Moses and yet they attack Christ as not from God and as a sinner. They curse the healing power of God that has been made manifest in their midst. The healed man questions, indirectly, how they can be who they say they are while condemning Jesus and his saving work. The rejection of Christ literally becomes the occasion where they forfeit their authority as leaders and teachers to the community. The blind cannot lead others.

Thrown out by the Pharisees, the healed man and Jesus encounter each other once more. The man is asked what might be called the evangelical question. He responds, "I do believe, Lord." Immediately he worships him. There is a two-fold movement. The man makes a choice. But God has also given him a gift, not just physical sight but spiritual sight or faith. This supernatural virtue is infused by God. He is disposed to this gift while the religious leaders who interrogate him are resistant to it. A relationship is established. Jesus responds, "'I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see might see, and those who do see might become blind."

Do we see the truth about Jesus? Do we acknowledge "the Son of Man" or Christ as Savior and Lord? And if so, does this truth find realization in how we live out our discipleship? If Christ is the LIGHT then we must also be partakers in this LIGHT for a world still veiled in darkness. This darkness excuses sin over virtue. This darkness encourages selfishness over charity. This darkness favors despair over hope. This darkness urges violence over peace. This darkness prefers ignorance and deception to truth. If we are to be the LIGHT before the nations then we must know the truth and share it. We must keep our eyes open. Too often, when we look at the lives of believers and non-believers, it is hard to see any difference. It is as if many are not converted at all. We must not be pretend Christians. We are either on fire with God's light or we are fakers sitting in the darkness, feigning to see.

When it comes to all the issues of the day, particularly those that have to do with the sanctity of life and the dignity of persons— we are contending with a veil of darkness. Consciences are numbed and minds are deceived. The popes from Leo XIII to Francis see the activity of Satan behind this moral relativism and misdirection. A culture of death is precisely a culture of night or darkness. Let us prove by our loving faith that we are children of the new day in Christ— children of the light!