

**4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent – Cycle A**  
**Sunday, March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2020**  
*1 Sam 16:1, 6-7, 10-13 Eph 5:8-14 Jn 9:1-41*

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*“Tell me who he is sir that I may believe in him.”*

The Abbe Dominique Peyramale was parish priest of Lourdes, France, in 1858 when the apparitions of Our Lady to St. Bernadette Soubirous began. A good and kindly man, Fr. Peyramale could be formidable and stern as well. When the young girl, St. Bernadette Soubirous, began to knock on his door and tell him about a lady appearing in a grotto near the river, Fr. Peyramale, very understandably, decided that a stern and formidable attitude on his part would not go amiss. If this young girl was playing tricks, or suffering from delusions, a sharp dose of severity from the parish priest may well bring her to her senses. It was a wise and sensible course of action. St. Bernadette, however, was unmoved by the harsh reception at the priest’s door.

One day, knocking on his door, St. Bernadette brought the message that the lady wanted a church to be built. The parish priest became very angry and upset at such a request. How was he supposed to respond to this! Anxious at upsetting her priest, St. Bernadette, nevertheless, persisted: saying, *“Father, I wasn’t asked to make you believe it, I was just asked to tell you.”* In the end, Fr. Peyramale did believe it, and what moved him to faith, to acceptance, was the persevering simplicity and honesty of St. Bernadette. He became her champion and her defender. The light dawned for him through the honesty and integrity of young St. Bernadette.

St. Bernadette’s witness is a vital part of the story of Lourdes, but in her own sober and humble way, St. Bernadette was well aware of the importance of human freedom. Nobody can be forced to believe. We should not try to force people to believe. Our response is a matter for ourselves. The task of the witness, of the messenger, is to give the message. *“I wasn’t asked to make you believe it, I was just asked to tell you.”*

When Jesus cures the man born blind in today’s Gospel, He demonstrates that He has come from God, as a light into the world, as a light to scatter the darkness. As a true messenger, he speaks openly and clearly by His words, His deeds and His character. To the newly-cured beggar man Jesus says, *“Do you believe in the Son of Man?”* *“Tell me who He is,”* the man replies, *“so that I may believe.”* Here is the vocation of the Church in a simple sentence. To tell the world about Jesus Christ, the light of the world.

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Yet Jesus knows that many people will not accept Him, and that many will actively oppose Him. As Saint John says, He came as a light, but many would not accept Him, because their deeds were dark.

The Pharisees, especially, opposed Jesus because, in seeing His popularity and His preaching and healing powers, they saw, not a sign of goodness, but a threat to their own position and influence. There is none so blind as they who will not see. They *refuse* to see the goodness of Jesus. It would upset their scheme of things. They commit themselves to the dark.

By contrast, the Christians of Ephesus are encouraged to commit themselves to the light. Saint Paul, in his letter, is well aware of the darkness of this world – foul language, promiscuity and all kinds of dissolute behavior. He tells the Christians to show up the folly of such behavior, not by attacking it, but by the contrast of a good life. If we live in the light, we will become light, he tells us.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, we cannot force people to be good, just as we cannot force people to believe. But we can “*tell*” of the goodness of life by living in goodness ourselves. People follow example, and if the example reveals a happy person, people will want to follow.

We have to remember from time to time that the Holy Spirit is the only one who can convert stony hearts, if the person is open to the Truth; but we must make our contribution as well. Our responsibility rests in praying for them, teaching with charity, and living a moral life for others to see and hear. The Old Testament prophets were warned by God that if they did what they were supposed to do as prophets, then their soul would certainly be saved and the souls of those they witnessed to might be saved. But if the prophet did not do as they were instructed to do by God, then both the prophet and those they witnessed to could not be saved. By virtue of our baptism, we are all prophets during the course of our daily lives.

When the early morning light creeps in at the window, it invites us to begin a new day. Every morning we are called to live in the light, both physically and spiritually. Saint Paul quotes to us from an early Christian hymn: “*Wake up from your sleep, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.*”

When the light of Christ shines on a person, that person becomes light itself, a pure and simple witness to the brightness and beauty of God; as St. Bernadette was long ago. Here is the vocation of a Christian – to bear witness to the light.

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*“I cannot make you believe it, I was just asked to tell you.”*

**Mary, Queen of a Prophets, pray for us!**

**Fr. Jim Canova**