

LENT 4
1Sam 16:1;6-7;10-13
Eph 5:8-14;
Jn9:1;6-9;13-17;34-38

Darkness is the absence of light, and today's readings explore the inner light of our relationships with God which is far more important than external appearance. Samuel falls into this trap when finding a replacement for the disgraced King Saul. Samuel looked for a more perfect version of Saul, but by looking for the inner light in a person God often selects a less obvious candidate from a human perspective. David was chosen, not because he was a morally perfect individual, but because he loved God.

Today's gospel reading is one of the 7 signs in St John's gospel in which Jesus reveals who he is. The healing of the man born blind is a commentary on the claim of Jesus to be the Light of the World (Jn 8:12).

Jesus encountered a man who had lived in darkness all his life. He was a man with a strong personality but in a sense he also represents all of us. The man was born blind, but all humans are born blind to the truth of God because of the sin of Adam and Eve. We have to learn to turn from the darkness of our self-centredness resulting from the absence of God's truth to the light of that truth. In this healing, the man's sight is restored gradually and his recognition of who Jesus is also develops in stages. In contrast, those in the story who claim to have spiritual sight plunge further into darkness.

St John's account states the problem, then the healing is described followed by the reaction of people to it.

Jesus' primary mission was not to urge people to become holy through rigid adherence to the law, but to bring them to salvation. This is why he is prepared to break the Sabbath laws in order to extend God's healing to those in need. The man born blind was healed and when interrogated he sticks to his story. He was blind, he can now see and God healed him through Jesus. In repeating this story to differing interrogators, he comes to recognise who Jesus is. In verse 11 of Jn 9 he describes Jesus as a man. In verse 17 he describes him as a prophet. In verse 33 he says he is a man from God, and in verse 38 he acknowledges Jesus as Lord 'who is to be believed and worshipped.'

The blind man's understanding of Jesus is the result of his encounter with, and experience of, Jesus. He trusted Jesus, followed his instructions to wash in the pool of Siloam and in doing so he was given his sight. This led him to reflect on the one who claims to be the Light of the World. His spiritual blindness was dissipated by that light and he became a believer. Once he acknowledged Jesus as the Lord who should be worshipped, he was kicked out of the local synagogue.

The Church affirms that Jesus is the Light of the World, Son of God and our Saviour and Redeemer. Yet there are signs that spiritual blindness and darkness are creeping through the Catholic Church. Some Catholics only see Jesus as a man. Others see him as a prophet filled

with God's spirit, but they do not acknowledge him as the Word made flesh who must be believed and worshipped. If Jesus is not the Word made flesh, God is not a Trinity of Persons and Jesus is not the Divine Son whose sacrifice on the cross brought about the reconciliation of humanity to God. Following on from that, the mass is not a re-presentation of that sacrifice through which we receive the benefits won for us and are spiritually nourished. The crisis the Church faces is one of faith. Do we remain true to the faith we have received, or compromise that faith in the name of progressiveness which will lead to a faith that is indistinguishable from other religions and eventually to secular humanism wrapped in religious cellophane paper?

The One, Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church is called to be the guardian of God's revelations that we have received so that those who come after us will also be able to say, "Lord, I believe," and like the Wise Men in Bethlehem, fall down and worship him. Stand Firm and Keep the Faith.

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