



4th Sunday of Lent



Date: Sunday, March 6, 2016 | **Season:** Lent | **Year:** C

First Reading: 1 Samuel 16:1b, 6–7, 10–13a

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 23:1–6 | **Response:** Psalm 23:1

Second Reading: Ephesians 5:8–14

Gospel Acclamation: John 8:12

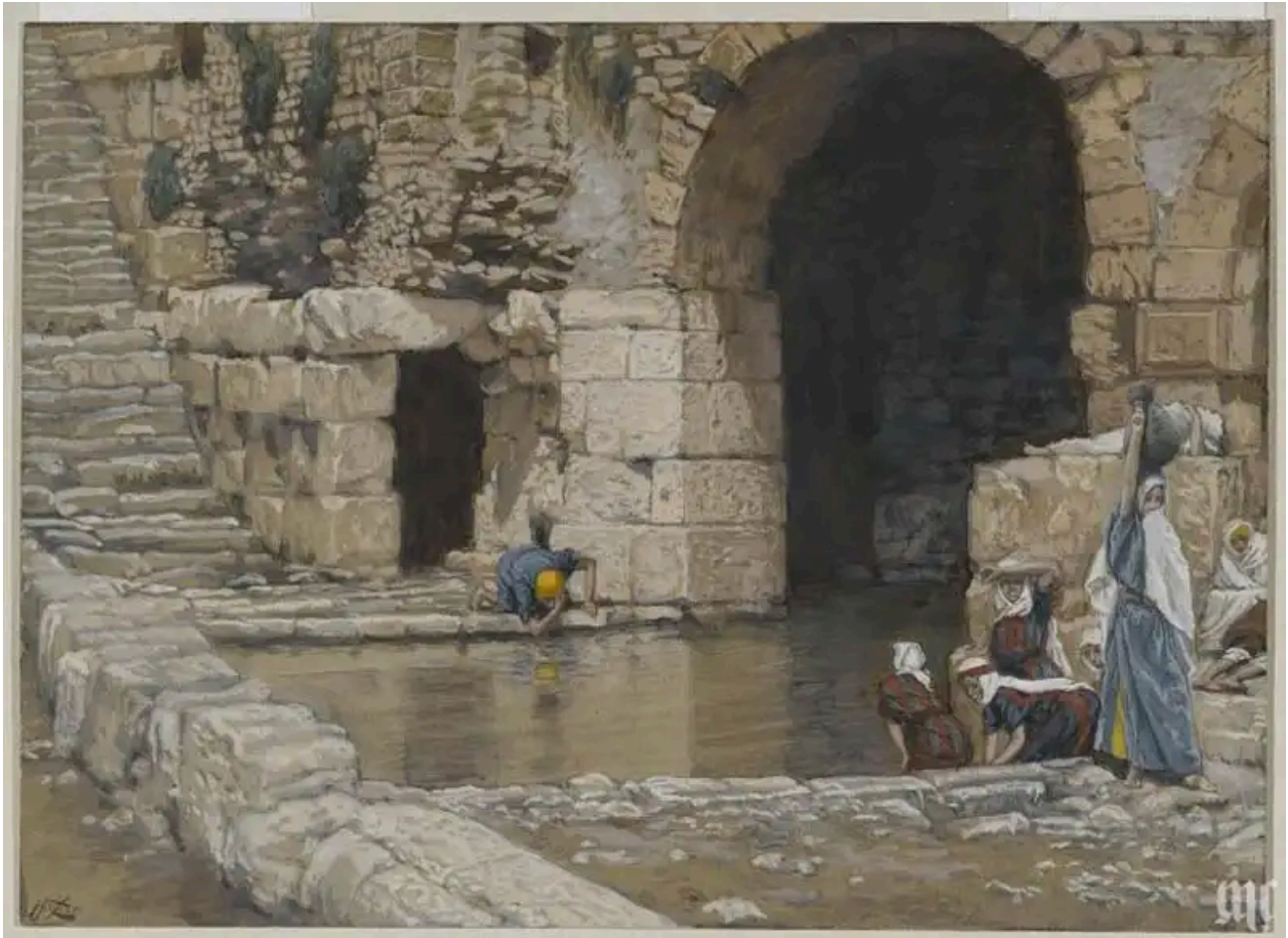
Gospel Reading: John 9:1–41

Preached at: the Newman Centre's St. Thomas Aquinas Parish Community in the Archdiocese of Toronto, Canada.

Today's rich readings all play on the themes of blindness and sight, darkness and light, fear and hope. In the first reading we see: how Samuel is initially blind to the choice of the Lord, preferring Eliab; and then we see how Jesse was blind to the possibility of his youngest son, David being the one God wanted; And so when David is revealed as the one whom the Lord anoints, the lesson we learn is that “the Lord does not see as humans see.” (1 Sa 16:7b) Too often we judge on outward appearances alone, believing we know it all, but the lesson from the First Reading is that “the Lord looks on the heart” (1 Sa 16:7c) and sees more than we see. There is a link here between seeing and light – for if we think about it, we can only see things that are in the light. In fact, we all know that when we allow the Lord to see our hearts, his gaze shines light upon them and they become transformed. This is the brilliant effect of God's light. It not only illuminates, but it transforms what it illuminates into a light that radiates and enlightens alongside his light. God wants us to not only receive faith, but to participate and contribute to others seeing and believing.

In the second reading we are asked to “try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord” and are encouraged to “Live as children of light”. What does this mean, we might ask? Light is one of the archetypal symbols of hope and encouragement. In the Old Testament, God is light who lives ‘in inaccessible light’. In the New Testament, this attribute of God is transferred to Jesus, for Jesus reminds the blind man, and all of us, through today's Gospel, that He is the light of the world. So to be pleasing to the Lord we must not hide ourselves from Him. We must allow His light to bathe us, and stay close to Him who shows us the Way.

We must allow ourselves who stumble in the dark, to be helped and guided, and this is the story in today's Gospel of the man born blind to whom Jesus gives sight.



The Blind Man Washes in the Pool of Siloam by James Tissot. Source: Courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum.

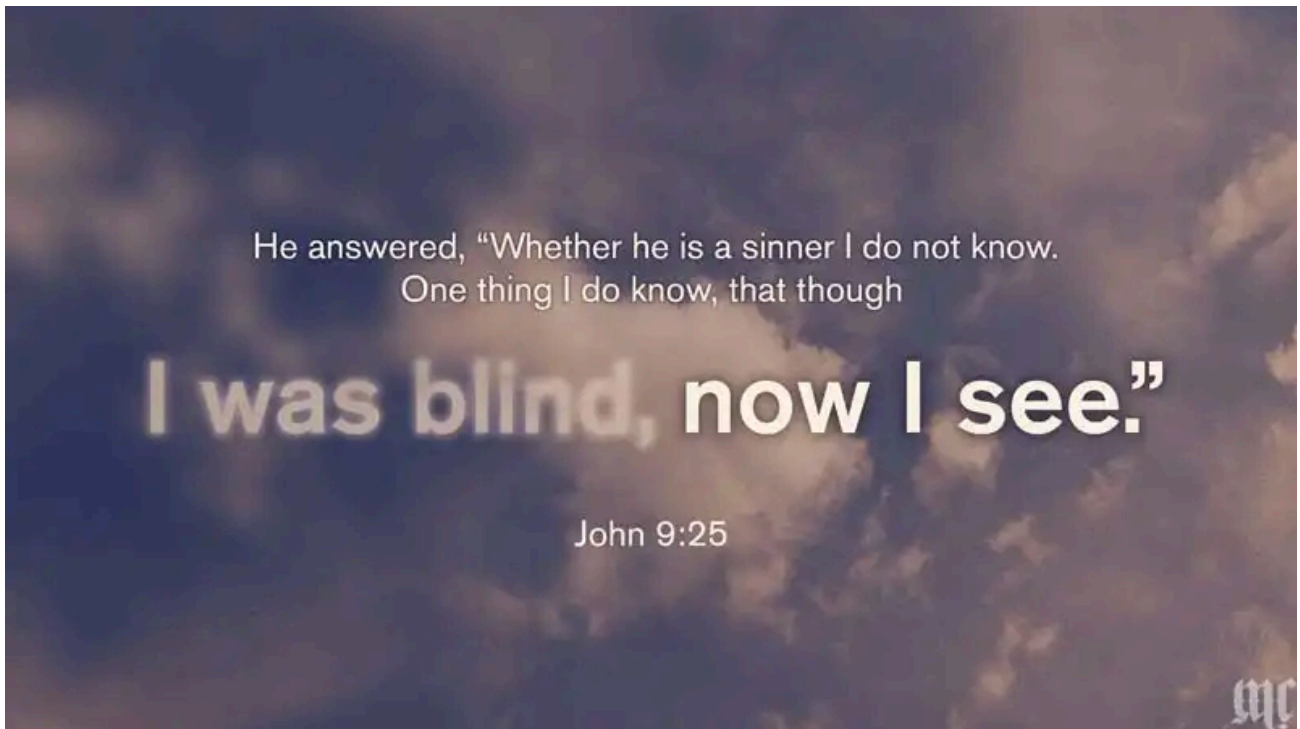
This long reading begins with a blind man who begins to see, and ends with those who thought they saw remaining blind. In fact, the pericope telling of the miracle of restoring sight to the blind man – who does not even ask for this miracle, Jesus just sends him to wash in the Pool of Siloam – is quite short. So the Evangelist is clearly not drawing attention to the miracle, but rather to the reaction to that miracle: the disbelief, the gossip, the condemnation, the blindness. Pope Francis, commenting on this Gospel noted how “[w]e see how the blind man who is healed is first interrogated by the astonished crowd who saw the miracle but could not bring themselves to accept it. He is then further interrogated by the disbelieving doctors of the law who also interrogate his parents, who are

themselves filled with fear. In the end the blind man who was healed comes to faith, and this is the greatest grace that Jesus grants him: not only to see, but also to know Him, to see in Him “the light of the world”.



The Healed Blind Man Tells His Story to the Jews by James Tissot. Source: Courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum.

And so we have this contrast, that while the blind man gradually draws near to the light, the doctors of the law sink deeper and deeper into their inner blindness. Locked in their presumption, they believe that they already have the light, and therefore, they do not open themselves to the truth of Jesus. They do everything to deny the evidence that is right before them. They cast doubt on the identity of the man who was healed, they then deny God’s action in the healing, taking as an excuse that God does not work on the Sabbath – so certain are they that they understand how God works; they then even doubt that the man was born blind to begin with. Their closure to the light becomes aggressive and leads to the expulsion from the temple of the man who was healed.



He answered: 'Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see. (John 9:25)

The blind man's journey on the contrary is a journey in stages that begins with the knowledge of Jesus' name. He does not know anything else about him; in fact, he says: "[The man Jesus] put mud on my eyes ... I washed, and now I see." Like Adam who was formed from Clay, Jesus performs a re-creation and gives the blind man his sight. Following the pressing questions of the lawyers, the blind man first considers him a prophet and then a man who is close to God. Once he has been banished from the temple and effectively expelled from society, Jesus finds him again and "opens his eyes" for the second time, by revealing his own identity to him: "I am the Son of Man" , he tells him. At this point the man who had been blind exclaims: "Lord, I believe!" and he prostrates himself before Jesus. This is a passage of the Gospel that makes evident the drama of the inner blindness of so many people, but also our own for sometimes we have moments of inner blindness.

Our lives are sometimes similar to that of the blind man who opened himself to the light, who opened himself to God, who opened himself to his grace. Sometimes unfortunately they are also similar to that of the doctors of the law: from the height of our pride we judge others, and even judge the Lord! Perhaps in thinking that the Lord only works in certain ways; in ways that confirm me and make me better than others. Today, we are invited to open ourselves to the

light of Christ in order to bear fruit in our lives, to eliminate unchristian behaviours; we are all Christians but we all, everyone sometimes has unchristian behaviours, behaviours that are sins. During this season of Lent we are in a favourable time to work on eliminating these behaviours; in order to journey well along the way of holiness, which has its origin in baptism. We, too, have been “enlightened” by Christ in baptism, so that, as St Paul reminds us, we may act as “children of light”, with humility, patience and mercy. The doctors of the law had neither humility, nor patience, nor mercy! They were blind, and presumed to lead others when they could not see. A few weeks ago I suggested that we could find ways to give thanks to God. Perhaps today we could meditate on this Gospel. We could go home and read it again. We can see how there is a way to regain our sight, our faith, by following the Light of the World, by opening our hearts to the Lord; and we can remind ourselves that the other way is remain blind, with a closed heart and a closed mind. Let us ask ourselves whether our heart is opened or closed to God? Is it open or closed to my neighbour? Now of course, we are always closed to some degree and this comes from original sin, from mistakes, from errors. Yet we need not be afraid! Patience, humility and mercy are possible for us too. Let us open ourselves to the light of the Lord, who awaits us and deeply desires to help us see the Father better, to give us more light, to forgive us. Let us pray for the healing of the blind man in today’s Gospel so that with God’s grace, we might go forward towards the light and be reborn to new life.”

Cardinal Collins on Euthanasia/Assisted Suicide



Today, Cardinal Collins, Archbishop of Toronto, has written a pastoral letter on Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide – topics that are currently being debated in the public sphere. His letter is reproduced in our Bulletin available at the door after Mass, and you can listen to him in the video above.

Let us join our prayers today with Cardinal Collins, that those who have become blind to the value of human life might have their eyes opened and that they might rediscover the light of the Lord in each person – however old, vulnerable or despairing. If we open our hearts to the Lord, then we can help shine God’s light, which as I said is always hopeful, always encouraging, always perceiving Truth, so that we might help those around us to see too. Cardinal Collins is encouraging us to have a conversation in our homes and with those we love about the importance of conscience, about the difference between dying and killing, about the inherent dignity of human life, and about the truth of our lives – that the miracle of life is a gift from God than cannot be rejected. No matter how we might judge, we must remember that “the Lord does not see as humans see.” (1 Sa 16:7b) Let us not be like Samuel in the First Reading and judge matters only on outward appearances and believe that life –

even with its suffering – can ever lose its value. Life is given by God and is a living, burning reminder in the darkness of our world of God’s love. Let us always remember that “the Lord looks on the heart” (1 Sa 16:7c) and that the Lord loves everyone – not just the strong and the healthy, but in fact, we know, he is close to the sinful, the weak, the blind and the lame. As Jean Vanier wrote in the Globe and Mail on Tuesday, “We are all fragile, and the vulnerability that comes with the passage from birth to death is one which we must each find a way to accept.” God’s presence is light and truth and mercy – and we must work to be signs of that to others in our world today. Let us try to understand that much of this desire for these so-called rights comes from a place of fear – a fear of being alone, of dying without dignity. Let us remind the world that we need good palliative care; that life is changed, not ended; and that we always have the promise of New Life – which we celebrate every Sunday when we come to Mass. Let us not lose sight of that Easter Good News. Let us always marvel at the miracle of life and not be like those who rejected the miracle in the Gospel, who chose to discredit, to disparage and disbelieve. We need to always reverence the dignity and humanity of each other. We need to be the Light in the world for each other. Because otherwise, others will see only darkness and they will remain afraid. As Christians, we are called to bring God’s light, God’s hope, God’s truth, God’s compassion, God’s mercy, God’s presence to everyone.

Amen.

Update:

In addition to Cardinal Collins’ statement above, the Most Reverend Terrence Prendergast, S.J. Archbishop of Ottawa has published a pastoral exhortation on Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide as well, contained below:

A Pastoral Exhortation on Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide (to be read at Lord’s Day Masses on March 5–6, 2016)

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, On February 6, 2015, the Supreme Court of Canada redefined medical ethics by striking down Canada’s Criminal Code prohibition of assisted suicide. This decision causes concern because authorities could interpret the subjective language of the

Court decision to allow euthanasia, with few or no constraints. The result? Society would abandon people at their most vulnerable stage, rather than provide proper medical care for their suffering and need. This is precisely how the Parliamentary Committee, which recently published its recommendations on February 25, viewed the Supreme Court decision.

From not only a Catholic perspective but any rational perspective, the intentional, willful act of killing oneself or another human being is clearly morally wrong. How can a just society permit the state-sanctioned taking of lives by our physicians? When any life is vulnerable and can be taken at will, the dignity of all lives is seriously eroded. Respect for all human life in our society is jeopardized.

Advocates for assisted suicide and euthanasia often raise the issue of managing severe, chronic pain. They propose terminating the patient's life as the best "medical treatment." Many people do indeed fear physical pain, but the Church teaches that patients in the final phase of terminal illness may receive whatever pain relief is required, even if, indirectly, it could shorten their life. The principle involved here is simple and clear: the goal of the medication is to ease the patient's great pain, not to hasten their death.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church explicitly teaches us, "whatever its motives and means, direct euthanasia consists in putting an end to the lives of handicapped, sick, or dying persons. It is morally unacceptable" (n. 2277). The right to life is not a matter for Christians only. It is a human right for all. To formally cooperate in the killing of the disabled, frail, sick, or suffering, even if motivated by a misplaced compassion, requires a prior judgement that such lives do not have value and are not worth living.

But all human life has value. The law should protect all life. No one forfeits the right to life because of illness or disability.

The Catholic Church does not advocate prolonging life at any cost. Rather, the Church is guided by the principle of the quality of life that considers the whole person and not simply keeping the body going no matter what. As rational Catholic Christians, we ask the question in eval-

uating whether or not to accept life-prolonging treatment: is there a reasonable hope of benefit without excessive pain, expense, or other serious problem?

As your bishop and your brother in Christ, I exhort you to fast and pray that our parliamentarians heed our concerns. Please take part in a Novena to St. Joseph from March 10–18. Let us pray that our legislators at the national and provincial levels will protect life, especially that of the most vulnerable, and that they will respect the right of medical professionals to refuse to take part in assisted-dying.

What else can you do? Take these concerns to your Member of Parliament and Member of Provincial Parliament. You may also join or start a parish pro-life group to support the work of resisting the culture of death and nurturing the culture of life in Canada. Talk to your friends and co-workers about the grave threat to human dignity and life that assisted suicide and euthanasia pose to our most vulnerable neighbours. Explain to your children, grandchildren, friends, and associates the importance of reverencing human life that begins at conception in the womb and ends in natural death.

I encourage you to be an agent of mercy in this Jubilee Year of Mercy—“feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, [comfort] the sick, visit the imprisoned, and bury the dead.” Catholics, like all other citizens, have a right and a duty to participate in the political process of our democracy. We must act to uphold the dignity of every human life.

Take courage. Do not be afraid to stand up for the value and dignity of life. Catholic Christians have a special role to play in resisting this culture of death. I call on all Catholics to be strong supporters and proponents of the Gospel of Life. Make your voice heard.

✠ Terrence Prendergast, S.J. Archbishop of Ottawa

Source: <https://sj.mcharlesworth.fr/homilies/2016-03mar-06-yc-It-04/>

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