Readings for March 22, 2020 – Fourth Sunday of Lent

Illumination

Jesus is the "light of the world," the One who overcomes all darkness. These Gospel readings (including last week's Woman at the Well, and the Raising of Lazarus next week), show us the power of restoration. Jesus wants to heal us, to restore us, to make us whole and new... How clear is my own vision, especially when it comes to seeing the work of God in my life?

Opening Prayer: Open my eyes, Lord, that I might see the needs of others around me. Help me to see with the eyes of Jesus. Open my heart, Lord, that I might act and love with the heart and compassion of Jesus. Amen.

Reading 1  1 SM 16:1B, 6-7, 10-13A

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.”

As Jesse and his sons came to the sacrifice, Samuel looked at Eliab and thought, “Surely the LORD’s anointed is here before him.” 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.”

In the same way Jesse presented seven sons before Samuel, but Samuel said to Jesse, “The LORD has not chosen any one of these.” 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.”

Jesse sent and had the young man brought to them. He was ruddy, a youth handsome to behold and making a splendid appearance. The LORD said, “There—anoint him, for this is the one!”

Then Samuel, with the horn of oil in hand, anointed David in the presence of his brothers; and from that day on, the spirit of the LORD rushed upon David.


R. (1) The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.
The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
In verdant pastures he gives me repose;
beside restful waters he leads me; he refreshes my soul.
R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.
He guides me in right paths for his name’s sake.
Even though I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil; for you are at my side
With your rod and your staff that give me courage.
R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.
You spread the table before me in the sight of my foes;
you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.
Only goodness and kindness follow me
all the days of my life;
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD for years to come.
R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

Reading II EPH 5:8-14

Brothers and sisters: You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.
Live as children of light, for light produces every kind of goodness
and righteousness and truth.
Try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.
Take no part in the fruitless works of darkness; rather expose them, for it is shameful even to mention
the things done by them in secret; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible,
for everything that becomes visible is light.
Therefore, it says: “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.”

Gospel JN 9:1-41

As Jesus passed by he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him,
“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”
Jesus answered, “Neither he nor his parents sinned; it is so that the works of God
might be made visible through him.
We have to do the works of the one who sent me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work.
While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” When he had said this, he spat on the ground
and made clay with the saliva, and smeared the clay on his eyes, and said to him,
“Go wash in the Pool of Siloam”—which means Sent—.
So he went and washed, and came back able to see.
His neighbors and those who had seen him earlier as a beggar said, “Isn’t this the one who used to sit and beg?”
Some said, “It is,” but others said, “No, he just looks like him.” He said, “I am.”
So they said to him, “How were your eyes opened?” 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.” And they said to him, “Where is he?”
He said, “I don’t know.” They brought the one who was once blind to the Pharisees.
Now Jesus had made clay and opened his eyes on a sabbath.
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.” 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.
So 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.” Now 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. They asked them,
“Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How does he now see?” His parents answered and said,
“We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. We 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.”
His 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.
For this reason his parents said, “He is of age; question him.”
So a second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, “Give God the praise!
We know that this man is a sinner.” He replied, “If he is a sinner, I do not know.
One thing I do know is that I was blind and now I see.” So they said to him, “What did he do to you?
How did he open your eyes?” He 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?” They ridiculed him and said,
“You are that man’s disciple; we are disciples of Moses! We know that God spoke to Moses,
but we do not know where this one is from.”
The 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. We know that God does not listen to sinners,
but if one is devout and does his will, he listens to him.
It is unheard of that anyone ever opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God,
he would not be able to do anything.” They answered and said to him, “You were born totally in sin,
and are you trying to teach us?” Then they threw him out. When Jesus heard that they had thrown him out,
he found him and said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” He answered and said,
“Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?” Jesus said to him, “You have seen him,
the one speaking with you is he.” He said, “I do believe, Lord,” and he worshiped him.
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.” Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard this
and said to him, “Surely we are not also blind, are we?” Jesus said to them,
“If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you are saying, ‘We see,’ so your sin remains.

Related Reflections

The man in this Gospel received not just his sight, but a gift of healing, wholeness and peace. He has a
new understanding about the world, about life and about Jesus. Let’s think about our ability to see. I can
see very clearly how my neighbor should raise her children. My vision is impeccable when it comes to
seeing a sister-in-law’s many flaws. My sight is 20-20 when I can see what someone else needs to do
with his or her life.

But what am I missing? Maybe I can’t see who Jesus is for me. Maybe we are blind to where Jesus wants
to lead us and our lives. We’re blind to the many ways Jesus wants to love us. If we can't see how Jesus
wants to love us, then all we see is our own sinfulness and certainly the sinfulness of our spouse, our
children and our parents. We can be blind to the good news.

In this story about blindness, no one got it. His neighbors and those who had seen him earlier as a
beggar said, “Isn’t this the one who used to sit and beg?” Some said, “It is, “but others said, “No, he just
looks like him.” No one could even recognize him because his life had been changed -- he had washed
in the pool of Siloam. How often do we say this person in my life cannot be from God because he is a
sinner? The Pharisees are saying, God cannot work in this man’s life because he is a sinner.
How often do we limit God? Jesus' biggest critics and disbelievers are those who cannot see -- the Pharisees! Yet they are supposed to be the see-ers of Israel, the Visionaries. It's clear they can't see the one who is right before them.

In the Gospel for the 3rd Sunday of Lent, we read about the Woman at the Well. Jesus offered her life-giving water. *Whoever drinks this water will never thirst.* Now the water he offers the man born blind is to wash, to be healed. He says whoever washes in me will never be blind again. We will see life in a new way. And we will see each other in a new way, with a new vision!

The invitation of Jesus is clear: Go. Wash. See.
Our response should be just as direct: I went. I washed. I see!

I know that I get blind in many parts of my life. I can get caught up in what I see as expectations. I focus too much on my own success and on how I am performing in a situation and I am blind to God's love for me. And when that happens, my focus gets all off. I don’t see or feel God’s love and I see only things that are wrong or off. My life is out of whack, out of focus.

For those of us who are parents, we may have had a few times where we wanted to have our kids hearing checked. My kids heard fine; they just didn’t want to listen! It reminds me of the kind of blindness we all have in many areas of our lives. There’s nothing wrong with my eyes. I just don’t want to see things from your point of view. How often do we argue with someone and we can't see their point of view? It's not that we don't agree with them - we won't even see their point of view. We are blind to it.

John tells us so many stories of blindness, including the disciples on Road to Emmaus who don’t recognize Jesus. Mary Magdalene in the Garden after the resurrection – she thinks Jesus is the gardener.

At Creighton University we send students on Spring Break service trips - not so they can do service for "poor" people but so they can see the world and see people from a different perspective. What did they learn on their trip from those people they went to serve? When our students come back from these immersion experiences in the Dominican Republic, doing service and learning, they get a T-shirt that says, "*Abre Los Ojos.*" Open your eyes!

We all have blindness in our lives - and we can all turn to Jesus and pray in the simplest words: Jesus, heal my blindness! I get blind in the same ways over and over in my life. I lose sight of your love when I think there is competition, when I’m pushed to perform, whenever I wonder: "what will they think of me?" When I want to make sure I come across as competent and I don’t see clearly when those competence buttons are pushed by my family, my friends or at work.

I lose sight of your love, even your presence in my life. All I see is ME. Lord, restore my sight, not just tonight, but in all those ways I live every day without seeing you, and especially in those situations when I go blind even temporarily."

Finally, at the end of the story, we see that the young man who is sent, becomes one with Jesus who sent him and who now experiences intimacy with Jesus in being rejected. To be one with Jesus does many things. It places us in relationship with God, and in relationship with our brothers and sisters.
It also leads us to imitate Jesus in loving those he loves on the margins and experiencing being rejected by those who reject Jesus. One thing we can be sure of, the evidence that we are becoming more like Jesus will be that we will disturb the culture around us. The more we are like Jesus, the more counter cultural we will become and the more people will notice and reject us.

'I went. I washed. I saw.' Four times the Man Born Blind says that.
What will we say this Lent. 
I went. I washed. I saw? I went to Jesus and let him touch my heart?
I washed in the love of his heart and experienced his love for me?
I saw and understood what I had never understood before: He is sending me to love others.

Lent is a process of having our eyes opened to see and hope and desire as Jesus does. Lent is about reforming our seeing, our hoping and our desiring. Sometimes we despair and say, "I don't have any home. I don't see any way out of this!"

Lent's answer to our dilemma, our hopelessness: Wash in the One sent by God to heal me. "I washed; I see; I hope; I desire." It's all new."

- Maureen McCann Waldron – from www.onlineministries.creighton.edu

Hugo of St. Victor (died 1141) used to say: Love is the eye! When we look at anything through the eyes of love, we see correctly, understand, and properly appropriate its mystery. The reverse is also true. When we look at anything through eyes that are jaded, cynical, jealous, or bitter, we will not see correctly, will not understand, and will not properly appropriate its mystery.

We see this in how the Gospel of John describes the events of Easter Sunday. Jesus has risen, but, first of all, only the person who is driven by love, Mary Magdala, goes out in search of him. The others remain as they are, locked inside their own worlds. But love seeks out its beloved and Mary Magdala goes out, spices in hand, wanting at least to embalm his dead body. [Later,] Peter enters the empty tomb, sees the linens that had covered the body of Jesus, but does not understand. Then John, the beloved disciple, love, enters. He sees and he does understand. Love grasps the mystery. Love is the eye. It is what lets us see and understand the resurrection.

That is why, after the resurrection, some saw Jesus but others did not. Some understood the resurrection while others did not. Those with the eyes of love saw and understood. Those without the eyes of love either didn't see anything or were perplexed or upset by what they did see.

There are lots of ways to be blind. I remember an Easter Sunday some years ago when I was a young graduate student. Easter was late that year and it was a spectacularly beautiful spring day. But on that particular day I was mostly blind to what was around me. I was young, homesick, alone on Easter Sunday, and nursing a huge heartache.

That colored everything I was seeing and feeling. It was Easter Sunday, in spring, in high sunshine, but, for what I was seeing, it might as well have been midnight, on Good Friday, in the dead of winter.
Lonely and nursing a heartache, I took a walk to calm my restlessness. At the entrance of a park, I saw a blind beggar holding a sign that read: It's spring and I'm blind! The irony wasn't lost on me. I was blind that day, more blind than that beggar, seeing neither spring nor the resurrection. What I was seeing were only those things that reflected what was going on inside my own heart.

Christ is risen, though we might not see him! We don't always notice spring. The miraculous doesn't force itself on us. It's there, there to be seen, but whether we see, and what precisely we do see, depends mainly upon what's going on inside our own hearts.

Fr. Ron Rolheiser – published on www.liturgy.slu.edu

Suggested Meditation:
Spend 5-10 minutes in silence as you reflect on these questions. Write down some thoughts if you’d like. Then, share a few of your thoughts with the group if you are willing.

What are some blind spots in my own life that keep me from seeing the world and seeing myself clearly?

The man born blind washed the mud from his eyes in the pool called Siloam, which means “the one who is sent.” How is Jesus a pool to wash the mud from your eyes so that you might see? Imagine Jesus healing and restoring you, healing and restoring our world. What comes to mind?

As soon as the man could see, his life became very difficult. People wondered whether he was the same man. Has the restoration of your sight (or maybe the deepening of your faith) so changed you that others are surprised at the transformation? How have you reacted to this?

So much fear seems to surround the restoration of the man’s sight. What fears do I now have about seeing clearly who Jesus is and what choices I must make to be with him?

The grace will come when I acknowledge that my eyes have been opened. Others may not want to believe I can see, but I know I can only keep repeating it, to myself and to them. I may experience rejection by some for claiming this new vision, but in the Light, I can see clearly the one who has healed me. I take a minute now and give him thanks and praise.

From Praying Lent by Andy Alexander, SJ, and Maureen McCann Waldron – (also published on Loyola Press.com)

Discussion Questions

Have you experienced a time when someone else helped you to see a situation, or yourself, more clearly, or maybe to see yourself as God sees you?
The blind man must have spent many years suffering. How does suffering make us more open to God? More open to belief, and to deepening our faith?

At the beginning of the Gospel story, Jesus call himself the Light of the World. How has he been light for you when you have walked in darkness? What hope does this give you when you think of Jesus by this description?

What attracts you about the person of Jesus as he relates to the blind man, or in other interactions with people? What does it say about the way he wants to interact with us?

Is the Church present in every dark place that you think Christ would be if he were physically present in the world today? What can your parish do? What can I do?

Closing Prayer:
Jesus asks the blind man, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” He asks us this same question today. Give me the grace, Lord, to figure out my own spiritual blindness and to invite you in to provide healing and restoration. Walk with me always, shining your light of goodness and justice in my dark world. Bring us your healing power where we need it most. We ask this with great trust, because we have seen and we believe. Amen.

Prayer for the week:
Open my eyes to the beauty that surrounds me that I may walk through this day with the kind of awareness that calls forth grateful living. In all of creation let me see the brightness of your face. Shine in my heart and on my life, filling me with joy, creativity, hope, and laughter.

Draw me into the radiant glory of your presence and into the small lights of those with whom I live and work. Inspire me to take time for those who are discouraged. May I live with the kind of presence that enables others to feel at home.—Macrina Wiederkehr, excerpt from Seven Sacred Pauses

Music suggestion:
Give Me Your Eyes – Brandon Heath