



SUNDAY REFLECTION

The clear theme of the readings today is the contrast between light and darkness. In an age of continuous street and house lighting we have very little experience of the contrast between the two. People in earlier times often went to bed with the fall of darkness and rose with the return of the light and so for them the contrast was ingrained into their daily living. It was, therefore, a very powerful image for the difference between good behavior and bad.

In our times the contrast is not so evident, in addition, we are more aware psychologically of the way in which our dark side is often the reverse side of the coin from our goodness; we are exhorted to make friends with our darkness and bring it out into the light. This makes sense because often when we do, our what is damaged in us can be healed and the light can penetrate our sinfulness.

This is what John's Gospel shows us Jesus doing in the wonderful story of the healing of the blind man. Religious ethics at the time insisted that physical disability was the result of sinfulness. The story develops by means of a series of questions: the people around wonder if the man they experienced as cured was really the blind beggar they knew formerly. When the Pharisees could not get him to deny Jesus they threw him out of their synagogue. This expulsion from the Jewish way of life was probably an experience of many early Christians: standing up for the person of Jesus could cause rejection by one's own. The man stands by his own truth and belief but is also willing to allow the light of Jesus to penetrate the truth as he knew it up until then and move him on. The experiences of life can question us about the way we believe and draw us deeper into true faith. If we are not to be blind like the Pharisees in the

story we need to allow our traditional way of looking at the faith to be questioned by our experiences of life in the twenty-first century: by the shortcomings in church life identified by Pope Francis, for example, and by tribunals of inquiry in many countries; by the increasing threat of climate change, or the advances in technology which call into questions our theories of just way. We remain blind at our peril.

The station church in Rome for this Sunday is Holy Cross in Jerusalem. For we remember and celebrate the victory of our Lord, cruelly raised on the cross by Roman soldiers in Jerusalem. Because of that victory we can look forward to the heavenly Jerusalem when the Lord God will be our light (Rev. 22:5). In that Roman basilica it was the custom on this day to bless a rose, regarded as the queen of flowers – a practice that gave rise to the custom of wearing rose-colored vestments today. In Christian art, heaven is portrayed as a garden beautiful with flowers.

Anticipating the proclamation of Christ as the light of the world – *Lumen Christi* – during the Paschal Vigil on Holy Saturday night, today's readings invite us to allow the light of Christ to overcome our spiritual blindness, our tendency to 'see' and judge by external, human standards, so that we may 'see' and judge as God does, by the interior dispositions, the 'heart' of each person.

In the First Reading, Samuel thinks that God will choose Eliab to succeed Saul because of his good looks but he learns that God does not judge people in this way. God has chosen David because of his heartfelt self-dedication to God, but has also endowed him with good looks. His anointing of David is confirmed when 'the Spirit of Yahweh came mightily upon him from that day forward.' In response to the first reading, the psalm celebrates Yahweh as the Shepherd-king of his people and David as both the ideal representation of humanity's trust and confidence in God and of God's shepherd-like care for His people: 'The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.'

The Gospel contrasts the spiritual darkness of the Scribes and Pharisees, who see themselves as the enlightened ones, with the spiritual insight of the healed blind man who comes to recognize Jesus as the 'Son of humanity,' the human one who is the 'light of the world.' Jesus reminds us that the standards by which we judge what is right and wrong, authentic and inauthentic, can become distorted. He invites us to recognize that God does not judge by appearances but according to what is often hidden from our physical eyes – the deepest dispositions of our hearts. Only God knows our deepest emotions and thoughts and only God can judge them. Our spiritual and moral blindness is revealed when we judge only by appearances, when we are closed to the enlightenment offered to us in Christ, when we ignore those around us who are marginalized and at risk, when we are interested only in whatever is immediately of benefit to ourselves. The second reading from Ephesians invites us to 'wake up' from the darkness of our spiritual blindness and to welcome the enlightenment Christ brings us in the Gospel. Like David, we are invited to open our eyes to the ways in which God has shown His shepherd-like care for us and for all our needs. We are invited to open our eyes to the needs of those around us and to the ways in which God wants us to act on His behalf in caring for the needs of our brothers and sisters.

STEWARDSHIP: The blind man was willing to let Jesus minister to him and willingly did all Jesus asked of him. The Pharisees were more resistant to His message, spending their time and energy to disprove the miracle. Which am I more like, the man born blind or the Pharisees?

READINGS FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

29 MAR '20

Ez. 37:12-14: Through the prophet, God promises the Chosen People suffering exile, to put His spirit in them and restore them to their homeland, an experience so intense that it will seem like coming back from the grave.

Rom. 8:8-11: The Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead, dwells also in us.

Jn. 11:1-45: The moving story of Jesus' friend Lazarus being restored to life from the grave points to Jesus' own resurrection and that of all who believe in Him.

CHURCH DESIGN Continued

A couple of weeks ago we completed a review of the principal areas of a church. This weekend we begin to look at the essential furnishings that will be found; and since we ended with the Sanctuary, let us work our way back from there.

Tabernacle: One of the primary and most distinctive fixtures of any Catholic church is a box or cabinet, typically made of gold placed in the front and center of a church. The exact shape varies, but you will most often find a red vigil lamp lighted next to it.

As Catholics we call the box a tabernacle and it contains the "holy of holies," Jesus present in the Eucharist.

The word *tabernacle* means "dwelling place" and refers to the "tent of meeting" that the Israelites built to facilitate their worship of God in the desert (Exodus 26). God commanded Moses' brother Aaron, the chief priest, to offer sacrifice within the Tabernacle, and specified that three things be kept inside:

1. The Ark of the Covenant
2. The golden lampstand (Menorah)
3. The golden table of the Bread of the Presence

Additionally, within the Ark of the Covenant, Moses was to put some of the manna that God gave to the Israelites. The manna is often described in the Old Testament as the "bread of angels," and was a heavenly bread that the people of Israel ate in the desert (Psalm 78:25).

Both the manna and the Bread of the Presence (a sacrificial offering of bread that was eaten by the priests, along with wine) have distinct parallels to the Eucharist that Catholics consume, and are seen as prefigurements of it.

When celebrating the Mass, the early Christians knew that they could not simply dispose of the left-over Eucharistic bread and at first, because they were being persecuted and did not have churches, they distributed all the remaining hosts to be carried to the sick and home-bound.

When the persecution ended Christians started to build churches and, at the same time, tabernacles to house the reserved Blessed Sacrament. The first tabernacles were often shaped like a golden dove within a tower suspended over the altar.

According to the [Catholic Encyclopedia](#), by the Middle Ages there were four chief methods of preserving the Eucharistic bread.

in a cabinet in the sacristy, a custom that is connected with early Christian usage;

in a cupboard in the wall of the choir [sanctuary] or in a projection from one of the walls which was constructed like a tower, was called Sacrament-House, and sometimes reached up to the vaulting;

in a dove or pyx [a round container made of precious metal], surrounded by a cover or receptacle and generally surmounted by a small baldachino, which hung over the altar by a chain or cord;

lastly, upon the altar table, either in the pyx alone or in a receptacle similar to a tabernacle, or in a small cupboard arranged in the reredos or predella of the altar.

It wasn't until the 17th century that more specific guidelines were laid down and tabernacles began to resemble those that we see in our churches today.

The *Catechism* further explains the history of the tabernacle and how "the tabernacle was first intended for the reservation of the Eucharist in a worthy place so that it could be brought to the sick and those absent outside of Mass. As faith in the real presence of Christ in his Eucharist deepened, the Church became conscious of the meaning of silent adoration of the Lord present under the Eucharistic species. It is for this reason that the tabernacle should be located in an especially worthy place in the church and should be constructed in such a way that it emphasizes and manifests the truth of the real presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament." (1379).

The Real Presence? How Can We Be Sure?

As mentioned above, the use of a tabernacle in Catholic churches rests solely on the doctrine of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the knowledge that Jesus himself is truly present under the appearances of bread (and wine). In other words, the tabernacle is not used in a symbolic way, to symbolize God's presence among us, but in a real way (like the Tabernacle of the Old Testament) to house and protect the real presence of God in the Eucharist.

This is also why Catholics genuflect when passing the tabernacle. We do so in honor of the real presence of Christ present in the Eucharistic bread reserved and protected in the tabernacle.

The vigil lamp burns as a sign of Christ present. On Holy Thursday night, after the Mass of the Lord's Supper, the Blessed Sacrament is removed from the main tabernacle to an altar of repose elsewhere in the church, for a time of adoration. For the period from Holy Thursday night through the beginning of the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday night, a time when we recall Jesus' death and burial, the tabernacle is empty, with the door left open and the vigil lamp extinguished.

Without the Eucharist, the tabernacle is simply an empty gold box.

LENTEN DISCIPLINES

Prayer: At the end of each day, ask what you have done that day which was different because it was consciously based on something Jesus said or did.

Fasting: Change something in your life-style. Ask "How does this bear witness to the values of Jesus?" until you find you have, do or say that could become more radically Christian.

Almsgiving: Choose to improve something in your work or school environment, or in your family or social life, simply by changing your behavior in some specific way. Be "salt of the earth" by adding taste from the gospel to something you do.

LENTEN WEEKDAY REFLECTIONS FOR THE FOURTH WEEK

Monday 23 Mar

'I will praise You, Lord, You have rescued me.'

Is. 65:17-21: As we enter the second half of this Lenten Season today's First Reading encourages us to look forward to the promise of new life and a world saturated with the presence of the risen Jesus. The qualities of this new life are vividly described for us. God's faithful people are promised that peace and justice will be theirs and that they will enjoy a future with their descendants. The response to the psalm is apt and summarizes the theme of today's liturgy.

Jn. 4:43-54: A number of people in today's Gospel are given the gift of new life. The child is made physically well again. Because of his faith in Jesus the court official, together with his family, now enjoy the possibility of having a relationship with Jesus. The timing of the child's healing gives confirmation to the official that faith in the person of Jesus provides the possibility that the 'new heavens and the new earth' promised by Isaiah will be realized in his own day.

The echoes of an ancient shorter Lent are still found in the semi-continuous reading of St. John's Gospel beginning today. The great baptismal passages of the woman at the well, the man born blind and the raising of Lazarus which once belonged to the weekdays are now Sunday readings. They are related particularly to the Scrutinies, but are also optional on weekdays in Lent. They speak of liberation, of a new-found freedom. The joy of that freedom is expressed in Isaiah's words today, 'Be glad and rejoice for ever'. The hope expressed in Jesus's words, 'Your son will live' is the desire of all who are coming from sin to forgiveness, from death to new life in the sacraments of Baptism and Reconciliation.

Tuesday 24 Mar

Ezek. 47:1-9, 12: The prophet describes the restored Temple expected by the Jews at the end of time. The sanctuary is the place where the people worship Yahweh and where Yahweh is present among them. But there is a cosmic context to the scene described. The life-giving water transforms creation and restores the vegetation to a state of great abundance, like Paradise. Even the lethal waters of the Dead Sea teem with new life. The Christian sees this hope fulfilled in the Spirit flowing from the side of the crucified Christ and given through baptismal rebirth.

Jn. 5:1-3, 5-16: WE come to the section of John's Gospel where Jesus is in Jerusalem at the feasts of the Jews. This feast is not named, but the focus is on the continuing celebration of Sabbath. There are curious elements in the description. The man does not answer Jesus' question about whether he wishes to be cured but he does as bidden. Doing what he is told, carrying his mat brings him into conflict with the authorities. But he has an answer for them: the word of Jesus is what motivates him. Jesus is rejected because He transcends the observance of the Sabbath and with patent authority.

Wednesday 25 Mar

Is. 49:8-15: This section is taken from the anonymous prophet called Second Isaiah and it promises a glorious future for the exiles who await release. They will have abundance of food and comfort because Yahweh consoles them. Yahweh will never forget His people. His justice demands that he be faithful to his covenant partner.

Jn. 5:17-30: The narrative introduces the deep cause for the rejection of Jesus, that He is the Son of the Father. From this mutual intimacy of life comes a common mode of acting in the world. This action is defined more closely as life-giving. To be a father is to engender life.

Jesus as Son resembles His

Father by offering true life to those who believe. Jesus is the Word who is to be accepted in faith, the Word in whom are the fullness of life and grace. Thus His intervention is not one of condemnation but of giving life.

Thursday 26 Mar

Ex. 32:7-14: During Moses' absence on the mountain of God the people who have just made a covenant with God abandon their commitment. Yahweh proposes developing His plan through Moses alone. Moses would become the unique ancestor of the Chosen People, but he pleads with Yahweh to remember the patriarchs of old, especially Abraham.

Jn. 5:31-47: The Old Testament tradition was that two or three witnesses were needed to confirm a claim. Jesus, in effect, cites three witnesses to His proclamation – John the Baptist, Jesus' own works and the Father. Jesus also contrasts two meanings of glory – the common one which is based on human achievement and the glory which comes from the love of God. Finally, Jesus also cites the great mediator of the Law, Moses, in his defense.

The manner of reasoning in this reading may be strange to us but its intention is to highlight the unique relationship existing between Jesus and the Father from which we are to draw eternal life.

Friday 27 Mar

Wis. 2:1, 12-22: The author of Wisdom appears to have been a learned Jew of the century before Christ who, living in the midst of pagans at Alexandria, sought to strengthen the faith of his fellow Jews. Thoroughly familiar with the Hellenistic culture of his day, he sought to adapt and use that culture in the interests of the higher wisdom revealed by God to the people of Israel. In this way, he has left a model of religious thinking for later generations.

Today's reading is taken from a passage in which the wicked – probably apostate Jews – announce their egoistic philosophy in opposition to the just. This author has in mind the picture of the suffering servant in Isaiah and Christian writers have seen a prophetic allusion to the sufferings of Jesus.

Jn. 7:1-2, 10-25, 30: As well as the common tradition that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, there was also a tradition that the Messiah would appear suddenly from some secret place. In terms of Johannine irony, those who believe Jesus could not be the Messiah – because (as they think) they 'know where He comes from' in human terms – are mistaken. Jesus comes from God who has sent Him.

Saturday 28 Mar

Jer. 11:18-20: A plot against the prophet's life, instigated by his family and acquaintances, is discovered through divine revelation. Jeremiah then experiences a shock that urged him to reflect on his mission and on the meaning of human existence. Do we ourselves reflect on the implications of our commitments? Does that cause us to falter.

Jn. 7:40:52: The dispute among the people as to whether Jesus is the Christ reflects what Jesus has said elsewhere about His being a cause of dissension (Mt. 10:34-36): people are challenged to decide for or against Him. Here, some think they have Jesus neatly pigeon-holed because the Christ was to come from Bethlehem, not Galilee, whence, they believed, prophets do not come. Apart from their factual error (the prophets Jonah, Hosea and Nahum were from Galilee), John means to say that they are in error at a deeper level because Jesus comes from God. This is the level at which our faith sees Jesus.

PRAYERS

Spiritual Communion

My Jesus, I believe that You are present in the Most Holy Sacrament.

I love You above all things, and I desire to receive You into my soul.

Since I cannot at this moment receive You sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart.

I embrace You as if You were already there and unite myself wholly to You.

Never permit me to be separated from You. Amen

A Prayer In This time of COVID-19 Crisis

Holy Virgin of Guadalupe, Queen of the Angels and Mother of the Americas.

We fly to you today as your beloved children.

We ask you to intercede for us with your Son, as you did at the wedding in Cana.

Pray for us, loving Mother, and gain for our nation and world,

and for all our families and loved ones, the protection of your holy angels,
that we may be spared the worst of this illness.

For those already afflicted, we ask you to obtain the grace of healing and deliverance.

Hear the cries of those who are vulnerable and fearful, wipe away their tears and help them to trust.

In this time of trial and testing, teach all of us in the Church to love one another and to be patient and kind.

Help us to bring the peace of Jesus to our land and to our hearts.

We come to you with confidence, knowing that you truly are our compassionate mother,
health of the sick and cause of our joy.

Shelter us under the mantle of your protection, keep us in the embrace of your arms,
help us always to know the love of your Son, Jesus. Amen

(Issued by the U.S. Conference of Bishops)

LENTEN FEATURE



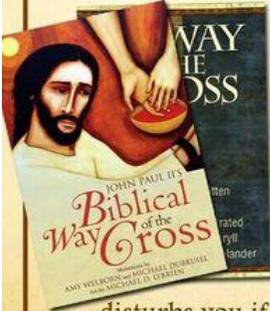
UNDERSTAND THIS:

The Stations of the Cross (just as the Rosary) belongs to the category of **Catholic devotions**, i.e., "external practices of piety" which are **not part** of the official liturgy of the Catholic Church, and therefore, do not become part of liturgical worship. Hence, anyone can write a different

version of them, and as long as they do not contain error, they may be used.

One should be aware that any devotion the Pope promotes (such as John Paul II's Scriptural Way of the Cross) is, by definition, legitimate.

Should one's devotion to Christ be based **only on** specific events marked as 'traditional' stations? What is it that disturbs you if a Pope wishes to enhance this devotion?



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Lent is when I determine which addictions I may still have some control over.



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