

FIRST READING 1 Samuel 16:1.6-7.10-13

A reading from the first book of Samuel.
The Lord said to Samuel: "Fill your horn with oil and go. I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem, for I have chosen myself a king among his sons." When Samuel arrived, he caught sight of Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed one stands there before him," but the Lord said to Samuel, "Take no notice of his appearance or his height for I have rejected him; God does not see as man sees; man looks at appearances but the Lord looks at the heart." Jesse presented his seven sons to Samuel, but Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen these." He then answered, "Are these all the sons you have?" He answered, "There is still one left, the youngest; he is out looking after the sheep." Then Samuel said to Jesse, "Send for him; we will not sit down to eat until he comes." Jesse had him sent for, a boy of fresh complexion, with fine eyes and pleasant bearing. The Lord said, "Come, anoint him, for this is the one." At this, Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him where he stood with his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord seized on David and stayed with him from that day on.

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

PSALM Psalm 22

Response:
**The Lord is my shepherd;
there is nothing I shall want.**

- The Lord is my shepherd;
there is nothing I shall want.
Fresh and green are the pastures
where he gives me repose.
Near restful waters he leads me,
to revive my drooping spirit. (R.)
- He guides me along the right path;
he is true to his name.
If I should walk in the valley of darkness
no evil would I fear.
You are there with your crook and your
staff;
with these you give me comfort. (R.)
- You have prepared a banquet for me
in the sight of my foes.
My head you have anointed with oil;
my cup is overflowing. (R.)
- Surely goodness and kindness shall
follow me
all the days of my life.
In the Lord's own house shall I dwell
for ever and ever. (R.)

SECOND READING Ephesians 5:8-14

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Ephesians.
You were darkness once, but now you are light in the Lord; be like children of light, for the effects of the light are seen in complete goodness and right living and truth. Try to discover what the Lord wants of you, having nothing to do with the futile works of darkness but exposing them by contrast. The things which are done in secret are things that people are ashamed even to speak of; but anything exposed by the light will be illuminated and anything illuminated turns into light. That is why it is said:

Wake up from your sleep,
rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION
Glory to you, O Christ, you are the Word of God!

**I am the light of the world, says the Lord;
anyone who follows me will have the light of life.**

Glory to you, O Christ, you are the Word of God!

GOSPEL John 9:1-41

(For shorter form read between ><)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John.

>As Jesus went along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth.< His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, for him to have been born blind?" "Neither he nor his parents sinned," Jesus answered "he was born blind so that the works of God might be displayed in him.

"As long as the day lasts
I must carry out the work of the one who sent me;
the night will soon be here when no one can work.

As long as I am in the world
I am the light of the world."

Having said this, >he spat on the ground, made a paste with the spittle, put this over the eyes of the blind man, and said to him, "Go and wash in the Pool of Siloam" (a name that means "sent"). So the blind man went off and washed himself, and came away with his sight restored.

His neighbours and people who earlier had seen him begging said, "Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?" Some said, "Yes, it is the same one." Others said, "No, he only looks like him." The man himself said, "I am the man." < So they said to him, "Then how do your eyes come to be open?" "The man called Jesus" he answered "made a paste, daubed my eyes with it and said to me, 'Go and wash at Siloam'; so I went, and when I washed I could see." They asked, "Where is he?" "I don't know" he answered.

>They brought the man who had been blind to the Pharisees. It had been a sabbath day when Jesus made the paste and opened the man's eyes, so when the Pharisees asked him how he had come to see, he said, "He put a paste on my eyes, and I washed, and I can see." Then some of the Pharisees said, "This man cannot be from God: he does not keep the sabbath." Others said, "How could a sinner produce signs like this?" And there was disagreement among them. So they spoke to the blind man again, "What have you to say about him yourself, now that he has opened your eyes?" "He is a prophet" replied the man.<

However, the Jews would not believe that the man had been blind and had gained his sight, without first sending for his parents and asking them, "Is this man really your son who you say was born blind? If so, how is it that he is now able to see?" His parents answered, "We know he is our son and we know he was born blind, but we don't know how it is that he can see now, or who opened his eyes. He is old enough: let him speak for himself." His

parents spoke like this out of fear of the Jews, who had already agreed to expel from the synagogue anyone who should acknowledge Jesus as the Christ. This was why his parents said, "He is old enough; ask him."

So the Jews again sent for the man and said to him, "Give glory to God! For our part, we know that this man is a sinner." The man answered, "I don't know if he is a sinner; I only know that I was blind and now I can see." They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" He replied, "I have told you once and you wouldn't listen. Why do you want to hear it all again? Do you want to become his disciples too?" At this they hurled abuse at him: "You can be his disciple," they said "we are disciples of Moses: we know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this man, we don't know where he comes from." The man replied, "Now here is an astonishing thing! He has opened my eyes, and you don't know where he comes from! We know that God doesn't listen to sinners, but God does listen to men who are devout and do his will. Ever since the world began it is unheard of for anyone to open the eyes of a man who was born blind; if this man were not from God, he couldn't do a thing." >"Are you trying to teach us," they replied "and you a sinner through and through, since you were born!" And they drove him away.

Jesus heard they had driven him away, and when he found him he said to him, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" "Sir," the man replied "tell me who he is so that I may believe in him." Jesus said, "You are looking at him; he is speaking to you." The man said, "Lord, I believe," and worshipped him.< Jesus said:

"It is for judgement
that I have come into this world,
so that those without sight may see
and those with sight turn blind."

Hearing this, some Pharisees who were present said to him, "We are not blind, surely?" Jesus replied:

"Blind? If you were,
you would not be guilty,
but since you say, 'We see',
your guilt remains."

>The Gospel of the Lord.<
Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

**I believe in God,
the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,**

(all bow during the next two lines)

**who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried;
he descended into hell;
on the third day he rose again from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of God the**

**Father almighty;
from there he will come to judge the living
and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting.
Amen.**

**THE WORD**

The story of the man born blind is regarded as one of the best-written narratives in the scriptures.

The healing by Jesus leads to the person coming to faith in him by clinging to his own experience in the face of challenges from the highly educated religious authorities. All that the man in question knows is that Jesus has cured him, and so cannot be a sinner, whether he has acted on the sabbath or not. By remaining true to his convictions, his appreciation of Jesus deepens, from being the man called Jesus, to a prophet and, finally, Lord, and worshipping him. The leaders remain true to their convictions, but these lead them deeper into unbelief. Their initial efforts to disprove the healing fail, so they argue from theology: because Jesus does not keep the sabbath, he cannot be from God. They cannot match the arguments of their irrepressible opponent so end up resorting to insult and excommunication.

It is by remaining faithful to his own experience and rejecting seemingly logical arguments from the religious authorities that the former blind man finds himself in the presence of Jesus and makes his act of faith. This is the culmination of a gradual process in understanding, and an example of how a person can come to faith in Jesus. ■

DO

If you can see, thank the Lord for your ability. Give some of your Lenten aims to a charity for the blind.

SAY

I am the light of the world, says the Lord (John 9:5)

REFLECT

Some people imagine that the Gospels simply relate historical events which have little bearing on the present day. This applies especially to those who imagine they understand fully how God operates, people who devise a theological system and feel that everything is now worked out: Jesus' criticism of the religious authorities of his day cannot possibly apply to those of our own. But the Bible warns us that this is a dangerous way of thinking. The book of Job is the classic critique of conventional theological wisdom.

The Gospel passage today is a masterpiece, comical in places, of the (formally) uneducated person who defeats the theologically qualified simply by pointing out the flaws in their argument. The most telling comment about the religious authorities in the story (and sometimes in our own day) is that they simply will not listen to the story of other people whose experience does not fit with their well-worked-out abstract theories. They accuse the healed man – and, implicitly, his parents – of being in bad faith, instead of thinking, maybe we should look at this again.

It is by not accepting the easy answers but by remaining true to himself and his experience that the person in the story, who represents anyone in a similar position, comes to true belief in Jesus. Unless we examine what we believe, we will not grow in our faith and understanding of Jesus and our relationship with him. This is not to doubt the truth: it is saying that the way we understand it has to change as we do. Pope St John XXIII famously said that the deposit of faith is one thing: the way it is presented is another. Yesterday's answers may not be sufficient for today's questions. ■

LEARN

The expression "the Jews" in the Fourth Gospel usually applies to the religious leaders, not to the people as a whole.

The Pharisees feature in the story today: the term is interchangeable with the Jews.

Both groups are presented as being opposed to Jesus.