

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT (Year A)  
3-15-2026 Homily

I. Introduction

A man named John wrote, “I have lived with depression for most of my adult life. The years have taught me to manage it with medication and talk therapy, but I still have days that feel like I’m swimming through wet concrete in the dark. When I feel swaddled in a dull gray darkness that smothers my usually hopeful outlook on life, I call on the miracle that occurred between my grandparents and remember that sometimes hope looks like just hanging on.”

John then described how his grandparents, Giovanni and Antonia, were a young married couple in southern Italy when World War II broke out. Giovanni was drafted into the Italian army; Antonia, having been born an American citizen, returned to the United States. She was pregnant with their first child, who turned out to be John’s mother. Italy was allied with Nazi Germany until, in 1943, it surrendered to the Allies. The Germans reacted fiercely; Italian soldiers were considered traitors, and many of them were taken to Germany as slave laborers. There they experienced brutal treatment, forced labor, and constant hunger; moreover, they were denied the rights normally granted to prisoners of war, such as sending and receiving mail. As a result, Antonia, back in the United States, had no knowledge of her husband’s fate. She was raising their daughter alone, and some people told her, “Face it—your husband is almost certainly dead. You’re a beautiful woman; you need to remarry, if only for the child’s sake.” However, Antonia refused; even though her hope was beginning to wane, something told her not to give up, but to just hold on.

Soon after Nazi Germany surrendered in the spring of 1945, Antonia and her daughter, then age seven, went to a theater. Back then movies were preceded by newsreels of current events, and one of them showed Italian prisoners being liberated from a German camp—and for an instant, Giovanni’s face flashed on the screen. Taking her daughter by the hand, Antonia rushed to the theater manager, told her story, and begged him to show the newsreel again—which he did once the movie was over. It was true—she had seen her husband’s face; he was emaciated and tired-looking, but it was him, as handsome as ever; she pointed to the screen and told her daughter, “That’s your father!” It took another year before Giovanni was able to emigrate to the United States, but it finally happened, and the family had a glorious reunion. As John wrote, “It is a story that has inspired me for years and sustains me during my darkest times, when I feel as though I have lost my way. Their story reminds me that even a momentary flicker of light in the darkness [like an image in a movie theater] can give me the strength to hang on until things get better” (Amy Newmark, *Miracles and the Unexplainable*, pp. 277ff). No matter how dark the darkness, the light of Jesus will help us find our way.

II. Development

Imagine what it would be like to be born blind, never seeing the beauty of the world around you, never experiencing the joy of colors and patterns and designs, and knowing your family and other people only by their voices, not their appearance; then imagine suddenly receiving your sight, and being overwhelmed and amazed by seeing everything and everyone for the first time. That was the experience of the man in the Gospel, and he responded to his miracle

in a perfect way: by showing intense loyalty and gratitude to Jesus. In effect, he had learned to see with his heart, not just with his eyes. This echoes the Lord's words in the 1st Reading: "Not as man sees does God see, for man sees the appearance but the Lord looks into the heart." We are all called to acquire or achieve this new, spiritual way of seeing; as St. Paul instructs us in the 2nd Reading, "Live as children of light, for light produces every kind of goodness and righteousness and truth." As the apostle notes, so many people have blinded themselves to the truth, and choose to live in spiritual darkness—and as Our Lord warns in the Gospel, they risk divine judgment because of their preference for darkness instead of light.

### III. Conclusion

Near the end of World War II American soldiers searching an abandoned farmhouse in Germany discovered a message on a basement wall. It had a Star of David, apparently scratched on the brick by a Jewish survivor of the Holocaust, along with the words "I believe in the sun—even when it does not shine. I believe in love—even when it is not shown. I believe in God—even when [I cannot hear or see Him]" (James S. Hewett, *Illustrations Unlimited*, p. 186). God is always with us, even when He seems to be hiding Himself; His grace is always available to us, even if it seems the entire world is against us; and the light of truth is always there for those who seek to find it, despite the evil one's efforts to enslave the world in sin and cover it in spiritual darkness. Many political prisoners under the Nazis and the Communists learned an important truth: if they chose to try to save their spirits or souls, they experienced renewed hope and inner strength, allowing them to survive; on the other hand, those who chose to try to save their bodies ended up losing both body and soul.

As John discovered through the story of his grandparents, hope is always a choice, and light can be found even in the midst of darkness. The secret is simple: trusting in God, and relying on His strength, not our own. This is how we will be able to find meaning in our suffering; this is how we'll receive the strength to overcome our weaknesses and faults; this is how we'll discover the courage to bear our burdens and face our fears. The darkness enveloping today's world can easily make us feel we're all alone, that no one cares, and perhaps even that God has abandoned us—and if we're not careful, we can become spiritually blind and allow ourselves to be led astray. Jesus came to save us from such a fate; He desires to take us by the hand and lead us into the light of truth and love and eternal life. Through prayer and penance, this season of Lent should help us cast off darkness and blindness, focusing our sight on what really matters and seeking the One Who is Light itself. St. John's Gospel assures us that "the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (1:5). This promise is utterly trustworthy, and if we choose to live in the light of Jesus, our faith will be rewarded.