

## Fourth Sunday of Lent

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, today we celebrate Laetare Sunday—a day of "rejoicing" in the middle of our Lenten journey. The rose-colored vestments I wear are a sign that the light of Easter is drawing near. Today, the Word of God invites us to move from the darkness of our own limited vision into the marvelous light of Christ.

In our first reading, we see the prophet Samuel looking for the next king of Israel. Like all of us, Samuel looks at the surface. He sees Eliab, who is tall and strong, and thinks, "Surely this is the one!" But God corrects him with words that should be carved into our hearts: "God does not see as a human see, for human beings see the appearance, but the Lord looks into the heart." How often do we make the same mistake? We judge people by their success, their appearance, or their mistakes. We look at ourselves and see only our failures or our age. But God sees the "David" inside us—the hidden potential, the capacity for love, and the spirit that is ready to be anointed. This Lent, we are invited to ask the Lord for "divine eyes" to see ourselves and our neighbors as He sees us.

This theme of "seeing" reaches its peak in the Gospel of the man born blind. This story is not just a historical miracle; it is a map of our own spiritual journey. Notice that the man did not ask to be healed. Jesus saw him first. In the same way, Jesus sees you in your struggle, your confusion, and your "darkness" before you even find the words to ask for help. When Jesus heals the man using clay and spittle, he sends him to wash in the Pool of Siloam. This is a beautiful image of Baptism. In the early Church, Baptism was often called "Illumination" or "Enlightenment." When the man washes, he doesn't just gain physical sight; he begins a journey of spiritual sight.

Look at the progression of his faith. At first, he describes Jesus as "the man called Jesus." Later, after being questioned and pressured by the authorities, he calls Him "a prophet." Finally, when he meets Jesus again at the end of the Gospel, he falls down and says, "I do believe, Lord," and worships Him. This is the goal of our Lent: to move from knowing "about" Jesus to truly "knowing" Him and worshipping Him as our Lord. However, the Gospel also gives us a warning. While the blind man is gaining his sight, the Pharisees—who think they see perfectly—are becoming more and more blind. They are so caught up in rules, traditions, and their own pride that they cannot see the miracle standing right in front of them. They are blinded by their certainty that they are right.

My dear friends, the most dangerous kind of blindness is not the one where we cannot see with our eyes, but the one where we refuse to see with our hearts. We are blind when we refuse to forgive. We are blind when we ignore the poor on our doorstep. We are blind when we think we have no sin. St. Paul tells us in the second reading: "You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light." This is our calling. To live as children of light means to bring kindness, truth, and justice into a world that often feels very dark. It means waking up from our spiritual sleep.

Many of us are carrying heavy burdens. Some are in the "darkness" of grief, some are struggling with addiction, and some feel blind to what the future holds. But remember: the man born blind didn't have to find his way to Jesus; Jesus found him. Let us use the remaining weeks of Lent to wash away the "mud" of pride, selfishness, and judgment from our eyes. Let us go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, which is our own "Pool of Siloam," where the Lord washes our souls and restores our vision.

May we leave this church today with a new way of looking at the world. May we look at our families with more patience, our enemies with more mercy, and our own lives with more hope. Like the man in the Gospel, may our testimony always be: "I was blind, but now I see."