

Lent Week 4 Laetare Sunday– 2026 Year A

Sam 16:6-7. 10-13; Ps 22; Eph 5:8-14; John 9:1-41

*'God does not see as man sees; man looks at appearances, but the Lord looks at the heart'*¹, the Lord says to the prophet Samuel when he is sent to the house of Jesse to find a King for Israel. Rather than the oldest, strongest and wisest son; it is David, the youngest, God chooses, who is assigned the role of king. God sees the heart. St Paul reminds the Ephesians and now us, God is light. He sees in light, and he offers us a share in that light; to work in and to rejoice in that light, as Paul said in his letter to the Ephesians:

*'Wake up from your sleep, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.'*²
How we respond to this light of Christ is how God will see us.

At the tail end of January I read to you Bishop Patrick's Pastoral letter, in which he launched his 5 year plan for the re-evangelisation of the diocese. This vision is summarised in a summary document 'Go Make Disciples', which you should all have a copy of, or you can pick up from the back of the church at the end of Mass.

Since he became our Bishop, Patrick has reiterated again and again the themes of Encounter, Discipleship and Mission. As he himself readily admits this is not something new: it is the key messages of the Gospel. It is the message of Jesus Christ himself, - what we call the 'Great Commission' - and is summarised at the end of Matthew's Gospel: *'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the*

*Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.'*³

What this means for us today Bishop Patrick has laid out in this document 'Go, make disciples', which I have already mentioned. To embark on this process Bishop Patrick has asked each parish -, in addition to the PPC (Parish Pastoral Council) - to establish a small working group called a Parish Mission Leadership Team, to draw up a parish 5 year plan and present it to him by June. This will be followed up by a visitation by Bishop Patrick to the parish weekend of January 16th and 17th.

At the centre of this is an urge to grow both individually and in community in our devotion and understanding of the Faith. We should, if we live at all in the nature of our Baptism desire to do this. How else are we to face a world of apparent indifference, or indeed open hostility, to Christian faith and values? How are we going to face the rising tide of Islam? How are we going to give drink to those who are spiritually thirsty but do not know where to go, or even what question they are asking? Through faith infused with understanding.

We should have a hunger to go deeper into our relationship with Jesus, with our life in the Holy Spirit, and our honouring of our Father in heaven: to love God. We need to understand what Holy Church - established by Jesus with his disciples at Pentecost - teaches and love it.

¹ 1 Samuel, 16:7

² Ephs 5:18

³ Matt 28:18

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We need pray with the whole of our being, to learn to trust God with a fervour and love that penetrates into our flesh and blood.

To start to do this we will form our planning team – which I hope will be in place next week - , we will continue the essential task of strengthening our existing Catechists and prepare new members so that we have a broad and strong base. And... we do not just wait. Each of you is asked to do something now, to take four steps:

Step one: Pick up a copy of *Encountering Discipleship* from the back of the church if you have not done so.

Step two: read it, if you have not already done so. Then read it again.

Step three: start praying about how, not 'if', God is calling you.

Step four: pray daily and discussing together what can be done, not what Fr. Andrew can do, not what someone else can do, but what you can do, even if you consider it ever so small. After all, each and every one of us is called to Encounter, Discipleship and Mission.

A final word from today's Gospel:

Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' He answered, 'And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?' Jesus said to him, 'You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.' He said, 'Lord, I believe', and he worshipped him.⁴

⁴ John 9: 35-38