

Fourth Sunday of Lent – Year A (Laetare Sunday)
Fr. Chad S. Green
Mary, Queen of Peace Catholic Church
Sammamish, Washington
19 March 2023

Scrutiny #2
1 Samuel 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a
Psalm 23
Ephesians 5:8-14
(John 8:12) John 9:1-41

Scrutiny #2: Man Born Blind: We Are All Born Blind

Last Sunday, this Sunday and next Sunday—the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sundays of Lent—we’re celebrating what’s called the Scrutinies of the Elect within Mass—those who are in the final weeks before Baptism at the Easter Vigil. The Readings from the Gospel of John for these three Sundays offer us three examples of “the conversion journey toward baptism and...the importance of faith in Christ”: The Samaritan Woman at the Well, The Man Born Blind, and The Raising of Lazarus from the Dead.¹

However, these examples of conversion are not only for the Elect as they “complete [their] conversion.” They’re also meant for all of us as we all deepen our conversion to Christ. As we surround the Elect and Candidates with our prayers—as they “scrutinize” themselves—we learn from and also benefit from the effect of these prayers, which:

“are meant to uncover, then heal all that is weak, defective, or sinful in the hearts of the elect; to bring out, then strengthen all that is upright, strong, and good. For the scrutinies are celebrated in order to deliver the elect from the power of sin and Satan, to protect them against temptation, and to give them strength in Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life. These rites, therefore, should complete the conversion of the elect and deepen their resolve to hold fast to Christ and to carry out their decision to love God above all.”²

Whenever someone makes the decision of conversion, there’s someone who doesn’t like that. *Who is that person?* Satan doesn’t like it when someone chooses to follow Jesus—or when someone chooses to renew or deepen his or her commitment to following Jesus. Satan will do what he can to prevent that—create obstacles or propose doubts, fears, or questions. That’s why it’s so important for us to surround the Elect with our prayers, in order to drive away Satan. And it’s a blessing for each one of us to be part of these prayers, as we benefit spiritually, as well.

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Last week, with the Samaritan Woman at the Well, there was something in particular that we took notice of. Something that we also notice in today's Gospel with the Man Born Blind—as well as something we notice in the lives of our Elect and Candidates here with us today. That is: Jesus' initiative in the process of conversion.

It's something I was reminded of on my retreat last month when our director began the retreat with these words: "Gentlemen, you don't *do* prayer. Prayer is something God does in us." Fr. Jacques Philippe echoes this lesson in our Lenten gift book, *Time for God*:

"...it is a matter of God giving himself freely to someone. Even if, as we shall see, there is room for a certain amount of initiative and activity on the human side, the whole edifice of the life of prayer is built on God's initiative and his grace. We must never lose sight of this fact, for one of the permanent and sometimes subtle temptations of the spiritual life is to rely on our efforts and not on God's freely given mercy."³

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We see this in the life of the Samaritan Woman. She went out to the well alone—and Jesus found her there. Precisely in her loneliness. Precisely in a place that she wasn't expecting. Precisely by Jesus' effort and initiative—not by hers. Yet, she was ready. She was open. She cooperated and responded. And it made all the difference.

It's only by Jesus coming to her. And gently uncovering what needs to be uncovered and healed. So that He could strengthen her and bring out all the good that He had put in her from the beginning. Only Jesus can do that.

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Today we see Jesus is the initiator with the Man Born Blind, as well. There's a dependency that Man Born Blind has, precisely because of his physical condition. Something that the world sees as a punishment, the Lord sees as an opportunity to make "the works of

God...visible.”⁴ And to make visible an important truth regarding the journey of conversion, healing, redemption, and salvation that every human must go through. The truth is: we are all born blind.

It’s the effect of original sin that is passed onto us from our first parents, and perpetuated by our own sins. There’s nothing we can do about it. There’s nothing we can do about it—yet, there’s nothing we need to do about it. Because Jesus has done it all for us. There’s nothing we need to do about it, except recognize that it’s true. And, as Jesus instructed the Man in today’s Gospel—we simply need to go wash in the Pool of Siloam, meaning “Sent”. That is, we must go to waters of the One Who Was Sent from God the Father.

The man born blind knows he can’t see. Therefore, he is open to Jesus’ healing touch and His instructions. He desires to see with his bodily eyes and—just like the woman who was thirsty for regular water, but received life-giving water—his openness leads him to receive both sight with his eyes and spiritual sight to see Jesus as his Savior.

In contrast, the Pharisees and those who can “see”—they don’t recognize their blindness. Therefore, they aren’t looking to be healed or taught. They remain stuck in their self-sufficiency, judgment of others, and blindness to see that they are in need of a Savior. As a result, as Jesus stated, they remain stuck in their sin.

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The Samaritan Woman and the Man Born Blind are examples of what freedom, joy, and the peace of God looks like. It doesn’t come from anything that we manufacture in ourselves; it doesn’t come from any self-help program; it doesn’t come from any of our accomplishments or even how good we try to be. It also doesn’t come from any of the ways that we grasp for comforts, pleasures, or temptations of this world. Those things can produce fleeting or seeming

freedom, joy, and peace. But, those things only quench our thirst for a while. We'll soon be thirsty again, and we'll find ourselves going back to those same old wells.

Without Jesus, the Light of the World, we'll still be groping and stumbling in the darkness. It's exhausting. The deepest and enduring kind of freedom, joy, peace, and light only comes from Jesus Christ.

The Samaritan Woman at the Well, the Man Born Blind, and our Elect and Candidates here with us today allow "the works of God [to] be made visible through [them]."⁵ On behalf of the parish, I'd like to thank our Elect and Candidates for giving us this gift. And to assure them of our continued prayers, love, and support as they complete and deepen their conversion.

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I'll close with another anecdote from my retreat last month. In one of his homilies during the week, our retreat director read a portion from the book, *The Little Prince*. It was from the Little Prince's encounter with the fox. Before the Little Prince said good-bye to the fox, the fox promised to share with him a secret:

"Good-bye," said the fox. "Here is my secret. It's quite simple: One sees clearly only with the heart. Anything essential is invisible to the eyes."⁶

This wisdom, contained in a children's book, is important for us to remember as we mature in our spiritual life. The only things that are essential—in other words, necessary for our salvation—come from the ways that Jesus speaks to us in our heart. That time in prayer with Him is the most essential. There—and only there—is where He gives us the life-giving water that we can't "see" with our eyes. There—and only there—is where He heals us of our blindness, and helps us see with eyes of faith.

¹ Diocese of San Jose Ministry News: "Q&A: Can you use Year A readings on the 3rd, 4th, and 5th Sundays of Lent even at Masses without a Scrutiny?"

<https://www.dsj.org/qa-can-you-use-year-a-readings-on-the-3rd-4th-and-5th-sundays-of-lent-even-at-masses-without-a-scrutiny/>

² RCIA No. 141

³ Fr. Jacques Philippe (2022), 7

⁴ John 9:3

⁵ John 9:3

⁶ Antoine de Saint-Exupery, *The Little Prince*, tr. by Richard Howard (2007), 63