

Wellspring Fransalian Center for Spirituality

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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today, we celebrate the Fourth Sunday of Lent. First Sunday, we met Jesus in the desert. The Second Sunday, we met Jesus on the mountain, transfigured in glory. The third Sunday, we met Jesus in a Samaritan town in conversation with a woman of ill repute, calling her to a change and transformation of her life. Today, the fourth Sunday, we meet Jesus giving sight a man who was born blind.

Today is also "Laetare Sunday" which means "Rejoicing Sunday." The word "Laetare" (Latin) is from the Entrance Antiphon of the Mass of the Fourth Sunday of Lent, meaning, "Rejoice!". Rose color vestments are worn by the priest and the deacon. Rose represents joy. Halfway through the holy season, we discover the bright color of rose in the liturgy, anticipating the joy of Easter. The season of Lent with its purple color in Liturgy and its penitential practices tend to be viewed as a morbid and sad time. But Lent is a season of hope and joy. Lent is the springtime of the Church. Lent is a journey to Easter, a journey from death to resurrection. We begin the season with ashes on our foreheads, make our journey to the cross, to suffering, to death, to the empty tomb and to the joy of the resurrection.

All Lenten practices are meant to foster a renewal and transformation of our life. We have reason to rejoice. We are a people of the resurrection and so a people of hope. We are a people redeemed by the all-embracing love of God. The world needs joy, men and women who are joyful, who found joy in giving themselves generously in sacrificial love, in selfless service, in kindness and compassion. The world needs men and women who will choose to light a candle of joy every day and let the gloom of the world disappear. We are called to be joyful witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus.

The first reading of today's mass speaks of the joy of Samuel when he found David as the man whom God had chosen to be king over his people and anointed him. Samuel rejoiced because he discovered God's choice of a king for his people. Our responsorial Psalm today is the joyful song of David because he found God as his shepherd. In finding God as his shepherd, he became confident, free and unafraid and sang, "I will never be in want or be afraid and only blessings will come to me" (Psalm 23, Responsorial Psalm of today's mass). St. Paul advised the Ephesians to live joyful lives because they are children of light and not in darkness anymore. Paul says, light produces benevolence, righteousness, truth and fills us with joy (Ephesians: 5:8-14, Second reading of today's mass).

The Gospel reading of today speaks of the joy of a blind man when he saw the light for the first time. Jesus gave him a new vision (John 9:1-38) and the blind man could see a world that he had never seen before. What else could he be but joyful?! But there were the pharisees who didn't see the light and so they became disturbed, upset, sad and angry. Their religion and religious practices were not joyful. Jesus called people to a joyful life of faith. The way of Jesus was the way of hope and joy. Lent is a time when we have a heightened awareness of this hope and joy. Lent is our journey to the Easter light, to hope and to joy.

The life of Jesus from the annunciation of his birth to death and beyond was one of great joy. His invitation was to a feast in the kingdom of God. At Mary's visit, Elizabeth spoke of the baby in her womb "leaping for joy" and Mary sang her song "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my soul rejoices in God my savior" (Luke 1:44-47). At the birth of Jesus, the angels proclaimed, "good news of great joy that will be for all the people" (Luke 2:10).

When Jesus send out this disciples on their first mission, he told them, "the harvest is rich" and harvest is about joy and celebration. When the disciples returned after their first mission and spoke of their accomplishments, he told them to find their joy in their names "being inscribed in heaven" and not in having authority over the demons. Then Jesus expressed his own deep joy in the plan of the Father for the salvation of all (Luke 10). And Jesus said, "I have come so that you may have fullness of life and fullness of Joy" (John 10 & 15).

One of the most traditional Catholic Spiritual practices during Lent has been the celebration of the sacrament of forgiveness and reconciliation. As we are beginning the second half of the Lenten season, it is good for us to take a moment to reflect on the joy of being forgiven and reconciled! Forgive and be forgiven, reconcile and be reconciled, make peace with yourself and others, joyfulness will be yours! Forgiveness is one of the most important sources of joyfulness.

The psalmist prayed (Psalm 51), "cleanse me, wash me...let me hear the sounds of joy and gladness...my bones will rejoice." Ha! the bones will rejoice! What joy forgiveness brings!!! The Psalmist prayed again, "give me again (restore) the joy of my salvation...sustain in me a willing spirit." Take a few moments and reflect on "losing joy and joy being restored". And take a few more moments to pray Psalm 51 and open yourself to the possibility of being forgiven and reconciled and being joyful.

Today, we celebrate "Rejoicing Sunday." Let us make it a "Rejoicing Week" in the middle of the Season of Lent, the Spring Time on our spiritual journey. Let us strive to make good and wise choices as Samuel did, renew our confidence in the Lord as the Psalmist did, live as children of light in a world that is often dark as Paul advised and open our eyes to see the goodness of God in and around us as the blind man did. I encourage you to take a few minutes each day of this week to be still and to think about how your day has been and on how you found joy in being a disciple of Jesus as you went about doing your daily chores and on how you have shared that joy with others.

Fr. Gus Tharappel, msfs

The Fourth Sunday of Lent

March 19, 2023

Fasting is the soul of prayer, mercy is the lifeblood of fasting. So, if you pray, fast; if you fast, show mercy, if you want your petition to be heard, hear the petition of others. If you do not close your ear to others, you open God's ear to yourself.
(St. Peter Chrysologus)

Collect

O God, who through your Word
reconcile the human race to yourself in a wonderful way,
grant, we pray,
that with prompt devotion and eager faith
the Christian people may hasten
toward the solemn celebrations to come.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

Liturgy of the Word

Prayerfully read the first reading and then read my reflections below and spend a few moments of personal reflection. Do the same with Responsorial Psalm and other readings.

Give thanks to the God of heaven, for his steadfast love endures forever.

(Psalm 136:26)

1 Samuel 16:1, 6-7, 10-13

Samuel went through a very difficult process of choosing someone to succeed Saul as king. He went through a series of prayerful discernment with great fear and doubt. Finally, in Bethlehem, he found David as the man whom God had chosen to be king over his people and anointed him. Both David and his birthplace Bethlehem occupy a special place in the history of salvation.

God chose Bethlehem, a place of no significance and David, a man of no significance to fulfill his purpose. Man judges by appearance, but God sees the heart. Be open and surrender to God's choice. Prayerfully discern God's plan for you.

Psalm 23

David had been a shepherd and he knew how to care for the sheep and what it cost him. He became shepherd of his people. He had to figure out how he should care for them. He knew the sheep well and now he must come to know his people, their ways, their needs and their concerns. This problem gave him a new awareness of what God, the true shepherd, is like in his relationship to his people.

Like shepherd...God knows his people just as they are in all their need, in their stubbornness and stupidity as well as in their value and worth. Like a shepherd...God reaches out, searches out the lost and keeps them safe. Like a shepherd....God provides food, drink, safety, light in darkness, Grace, comfort and strength in "dark valley moments". This Psalm proclaims the enduring, steadfast, loyal, unconquerable love of God, the good shepherd, who will never let us slip out of his hands!

**The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
In verdant pastures he gives me repose,
Beside restful waters he leads me,
He refreshes my soul.**

Ephesians: 5:8-14

Paul challenged Ephesians to live as children of light because they are light in the Lord. Those who were in darkness once have come into the light of Christ. Paul says, light produces benevolence, righteousness and truth. Children of light must cultivate generosity of spirit, work for justice for all and live in truth. Just as Jesus was a light to other nations, the light that revealed justice and peace through Israel, today the world must experience justice and peace of God through us and our church and our church institutions.

You are the light of the world... your light must shine before men so that they may see goodness in your acts and give praise to your heavenly Father (Mathew 5:14-16).

Light makes things visible, gives us warmth, brings us comfort and makes us feel safe!

Reflect on what it means for you to be children of light, to be light for others!

John 9:1-38

In this excerpt, we read the story of the blind beggar, who went, washed as Jesus told him to and was able to see. Jesus spat on the ground, made mud paste with his saliva and smeared the man's eyes with the mud paste and asked him to go and wash in the pool of Siloam.

Something of Jesus and something of the earth made all the difference. He came to believe in Jesus. Belief in Jesus made the difference, and his life was never the same.

The San Francisco Examiner once reported that a blind man, who had been hired to work in a bank under a special government-funded jobs program, was leaving the bank one day when he tripped over his seeing-eye dog and fell down the steps. Miraculously, the fall and a sharp blow to the man's head restored his sight. His joy was short-lived. Because he could now see, he no longer qualified for the jobs program and was fired from his position at the bank.

The man born blind enters the paradox of meeting Jesus, receiving his sight, then being expelled from the Synagogue. He was once a skillful beggar, self-sufficient, well positioned at a prime spot right next to the pool of Siloam. Now he could see and therefore he is faced with finding a job for the first time in his life...and out of the Synagogue!

What a journey! A nameless blind man moves from blindness through mud paste, through the cleansing pool to a new vision of himself and out the Synagogue to new life, to new risks, to new challenges! Knowing Jesus meant salvation for the blind beggar, but at great cost to himself.

Knowing Jesus means life-changing conversion for all of us. Be alert! Be awake! Be ready!

Reflect and pray.....

- **How often judgments are made from appearance? Reflect on the need to look beyond appearance? Search for the real.**
- **What does it mean to live as children of light?**
- **What do you need to wash so that you may have a clearer vision?**
- **Have you found a new vision in Jesus?**
- **"the blind man washed and was able to see" - what does this mean in terms of your personal life?**
- **What area of your life need to be touched by Jesus?**

Be Still for a few moments!

Pray for your needs and those of your family and community.

Spiritual Communion

Lord Jesus, I believe in your real presence in the Eucharist, the Sacrament of the Altar. I place myself in your presence and adore you, worship you and glorify you. I am unable to receive you in Holy Communion at Mass today. I hunger and thirst for your way, your truth and your life. Come into my heart Lord and satisfy my hunger and quench my thirst. Bless me that I may give witness to your presence in my life. Amen

Be Still for a few moments!

Saint of the Day, March 19 - Saint Joseph and 8 other saints are remembered this day.

We know very little about Joseph, the husband of Mary. New Testament writings tell us that Joseph was born into the lineage of David. Matthew's Gospel describes Joseph as a "just man." In Biblical times, one of the most beautiful compliments one person could give to another was to call him or her "tzaddik," a person of justice and virtue. Joseph was a man who followed his dreams and visions. He listened to the angel asking him not to be afraid to take Mary home as his wife and listened again to the Angel asking him to take the child Jesus to safety and protect him from Herod. He was a just and virtuous man, and he followed his dreams faithfully. He faced many challenges and responsibilities, and he handled them with unfailing courage. We do not have any reliable information about the death of Joseph.

(This year, the feast of St. Joseph is moved to tomorrow, Monday, March 20, since today is the fourth Sunday of Lent)

Fr. Gus Tharappel, msfs

**Rejoice in the Lord always. I say it again, rejoice.
Everyone should see how unselfish you are. The Lord is near.
(Philippians 4:4-5)**