

Homily: Lent 4, 2026

Year A

1st Samuel 16:1-13

Fr. Robert Gaestel

Ephesians 5:1-14

St. John 9:1-38

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Today, on the Fourth Sunday of Lent, we have the second of three very long readings from the Gospel of St. John, a particular feature of this first year of our three-year-lectionary. Last week was the Woman at the Well. Next week is the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Today, the Healing of the Man Born Blind, at the hands of he who is the Light of the World. Even a cursory reading of this story reveals that what Jesus does with this one person is not for him alone, but discloses that it is for everyone and why. In healing this person, we see what is offered to all: that Christ makes us, all of us, one with the Light he is.

We open with a problem. There is a man who cannot see. In fact, he has never been able to see. Jesus's disciples as well as the religious leaders, and everyone else thinks that it is all his problem, not theirs. The real question though is not about our seeing the outside world, but our inability to see the inside world, which is to say whether or not we possess insight. This comes to the fore in today's Old Testament reading. Samuel hears God say, "The Lord sees not as man sees. Man, the human, humanity as a whole, looks upon the outward appearance,

but the Lord looks on the heart.” For the Bible, the heart is not just the organ that pumps the blood, but is instead, the seat and center of the whole person. For the Bible, the heart is the ground of our thoughts, our feelings, and our actions. It is the place from which each one of us says, along with God, “I am.”

Do we have insight? Do we have the vision, the clarity of sight of our own heart so that we can look upon it as God does? To find out we must ask ourselves some questions we’re probably fearful of asking, because maybe if we do, we will find, to borrow from Gertrude Stein, that “There’s no there, there.” But if we are to press on, what are the questions? How about: what do we see and what do we not see? And why do we not see, and how can we truly see?

There is a word used with some frequency these days to account for the divisiveness and polarization abounding in our contemporary society. It is said that the reason for this state of affairs is that all of us are in our own silos. We choose to separate ourselves into self-contained enclaves of like mindedness about such things as politics: silos of red and blue, social class, education, ethnicity, gender, you name it and keeping our distance. As an aside, when I was in the 5th grade, I came to California from New Jersey. We drove across the country. On the highway across Nebraska, on the horizon you could see grain elevators, in other words, silos. When first seen in the distance they were tiny, but they grew in size

as we approached. Finally, we'd speed past them and they would recede into the background and a new set would appear in the distance. It was like the opening to the original *Star Trek*, when the Enterprise would suddenly come from nowhere, flash across the screen and disappear into the distance.

Well, what are these silos for? The other name for them, grain elevators, tells us they store grain until it is needed. Yes, but why? In the Daily Scripture Readings for this this time, the Old Testament is from Genesis. We're at the story of Joseph, of coat-of-many-colors fame. He interpreted the Pharoah's dream about an impending famine. He was put in charge of preparing for it and he collected 20% of each year's harvest as a hedge against future crop failures. In other words, he put it in silos. Silos exist to provide safety. That is not a bad thing. There are good reasons to do this. In the story of Joseph and his brothers, there really is something at stake, as in life and death.

The movie *Fiddler on the Roof* speaks to this in the very opening with the song *Tradition*. The only word in the song's refrain is "tradition" repeated no less than five times. The rest of the song is about all the traditional practices that fill their lives individually and the life of the community as a whole. This is how we live. We do things in this way and no other. Why? Because it is our tradition. It's not until the end of the song that we find out the real why. When Tevye points to a

man standing on the ridge of a roof, playing a violin, moving his arms back and forth, keeping his balance with his feet resting on a surface less than an inch wide, Tevye says, “without our traditions, our lives would be as shaky, as precarious as a fiddler on a roof.”

Recently the social and political commentator Dennis Praeger fell when stepping out of his shower. He broke the C3 and C4 vertebrae as well as hitting his head. His fall left him paralyzed from the shoulder down. He nearly died, and was in the ICU and on a ventilator for two-and-a-half weeks before he could breathe on his own. The damage is permanent. In today’s reading from Ephesians, St. Paul speaks of the kinds of conduct that are inconsistent with the Christian vision for human life: things he says that “are not fitting.” Why does he say this? Is he just laying the ground work for what in our culture used to be called, “blue laws?” Not really. His point is that these behaviors can do permanent damage leaving a person disabled, handicapped, crippled for the rest of their life, meaning not just life here and now, but also in the life to come.

So, maybe it’s not such a bad thing to separate oneself, one’s community from influencers such as St. Paul speaks of. Maybe it’s a good thing to wall oneself off from things that are not fitting; and not just things that are not fitting, but also other people who, for whatever reason are themselves not fitting either.

It has been tried. There are the remains of the Hadrian's Wall in the north of England. In China there is not only a great wall from centuries ago, but also in the current time, the "Great Firewall" across the internet. Even God himself once tried it, saying to Noah, "You alone have I seen are righteous," and "We're gonna need a bigger boat." But all that did was wash the outer appearance without touching the heart of the matter. And when the flood was over, for Noah, it did not end well. Rather the whole sad story started again where it left off and walked the same path of what always happens until...today, as in today's Gospel.

In today's Gospel, Jesus and his disciples, both then and now, come upon a cluster of silos. What are some of those? "Who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?" In its own way this is the same question people ask now when they learn of someone diagnosed with cancer. Did they smoke? Did they not eat their kale? There is the silo of the community and of not wanting to be canceled by it. There is the silo of the experts who take upon themselves the authority to tell others what to think and do. There is silo of "we've always thought and acted this way. So, don't confuse me with the facts. My mind is made up."

"This man is not from God because he doesn't keep the sabbath." That's true if one only looks on the outward appearance. What do we see and what do we

not see? Why do we not see, and how can we truly see? Well, maybe, just maybe the reason why Jesus doesn't keep the sabbath is because there is not yet a sabbath to keep. Do you remember what we heard on the First Sunday of Lent? Do you remember the Second Creation Story? "In the day the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet on earth, and there was as yet no rain, nor the human to till the ground, but a mist went up and watered the whole face of the ground and the Lord formed man, the human, out of the dust and breathed into him the breath of life. And behold the human became a living being." And now today, Jesus spat on the ground, made clay of the spittle, anointed the man's eyes with the clay, sent him to wash, and the man came back seeing. The words of the Church Father, St. Irenaeus are apt. "The glory of God is man and woman fully alive."

To not keep the sabbath is not merely going to Trader Joe's on Sunday rather than going to church. That is just the outward appearance. Not keeping the sabbath is going to Trader Joe's on Sunday because you are blind, as in totally clueless about what the sabbath is and is for. Last week we saw the contrast between water for which one will thirst again as in, "Got Milk?" And water becoming in us a spring welling up to eternal life.

So, what is the silo, or silos we can see we're in? What keeps us only seeing the outward appearance rather than looking upon the heart, that is, our own? How can we see? Is there a remedy for our eyes wide shut?

Well, the liturgy does provide a means. It's called the Confession and it can come in one of two places in the service. It can come at the very beginning. It's like wiping your feet at the door. Or, it can come in the middle after hearing the Scripture readings, reciting the Creed, and the Prayers of the People. This is like washing your hands before sitting down to the meal. There is a very short introduction: "Let us confess our sins against God and our neighbor." It's a bit like the "5 Second Rule," picking up a piece of food you dropped on the floor within 5 seconds makes it still safe to eat. There is also another introduction that takes a bit more time, and allows for us to consider what we don't see, why we do not see, and how we can truly see. It says things like, "truly and earnestly repent you of your sins," "are in love and charity with your neighbors," and "intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God and walking from now on in his holy ways." In other words, it's not just, "things known and unknown, things done and left undone." But instead, to be able to see who really is the Light of the World: Christ who makes us one with the light he is. In his poem *The Spiritual Canticle*, St. John of the Cross puts it this way.

*When you looked at me
Your eyes imprinted Your grace in me
For this You loved me ardently;
And thus my eyes deserved
To adore what they beheld in You.*