

Homily of Fourth Sunday of Lent, Year A, 2026

1 Samuel 16:1, 6-7, 10-13; Psalm 23:1-6; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41

The Fourth Sunday of Lent is called *Laetare* Sunday, meaning Sunday of Joy. *Laetare* (Latin) means ‘rejoice.’ It comes from the first word of today’s Mass entrance antiphon, “Rejoice, Jerusalem, and all who were in mourning; exult and be satisfied at her consoling breast” (Isaiah 66:10-11). In the past, the Lenten season used to be very austere. The Fourth Sunday of Lent, being a mid-way of the Lenten season, used to be a day to relax austere fasting. *Laetare* Sunday foreshadows the hope and joy that await us at Easter. It is also known as “Rose Sunday” because rose-colored vestments are traditionally worn.

In the first reading, Samuel did not know who God was going to choose to replace Saul as the king of Israel. God guided him until he anointed David. “Samuel looked at Eliab and thought, ‘Surely the Lord’s anointed is here before him.’ but the Lord said to Samuel: ‘Do not judge from appearance or from lofty stature, because I have rejected him. Not as man sees does God see, because man sees the appearance but the Lord looks into the heart.’” Samuel would have made a wrong choice if he had not followed God’s guidance. The first reading has a few lessons for us.

1. Appearance can be deceptive. Therefore, we must not make judgements and conclusions, hastily, based on appearance, initial impressions, and thoughts. Sometimes, there is more than meets the eye. Sometimes, what is on the surface is only the tip of the iceberg. We hear it often said, “All that glitters is not gold.” Discernment and prayer are important before decisions are made. It is important to listen attentively to God and follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
2. Samuel did not depend on what was presented to him. He made inquiry: “‘Are these all the sons you have?’ Jesse replied, ‘There is still the youngest, but he is tending the sheep.’ Samuel said to Jesse, ‘Send for him; we will not sit down to eat until he arrives here.’” We must not be afraid or reluctant to ask valid questions which may help to a better understanding of the matter or help to unravel the truth. My dad, God rest his soul, used to tell me, “Son, do not call a mirage a river.”
3. Someone says, “Do not be discouraged. It is often the last key in the bunch that unlocks the lock.” David was the last key in the bunch. If you try and fail, try, try, try again!
4. Jesse never imagined that the youngest of his sons could be considered for such an exalted position. Let us not underestimate what God can do in and through us or what God can do in and through someone else.
5. God knows the heart of each one of us. We can deceive our fellow human beings, but we cannot deceive God. The Lord said to Samuel, “Not as man sees does God see, because man sees the appearance, but the Lord looks into the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7). “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways” (Isaiah 55:8-9).

We pray for those who, by the nature of their calling or responsibility, must make judgements on others that they may be open to the wisdom and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. We pray, too, for all of us that we may seek to be guided by the Holy Spirit in our choices and judgements.

In the gospel, the physically blind man who was healed by Jesus, recognized Jesus as a prophet and worshipped him. Meanwhile, the spiritually blind Jews refused to see God's wonderful work in Jesus and did not recognize that Jesus came from God.

The Jews ridiculed the man who was healed by Jesus and "threw him out" of the synagogue because he continued to insist that Jesus came from God. He was expelled from the synagogue because he rejected falsehood and insisted on the truth. How often does this happen among us, that people who insist on the truth are ridiculed, suppressed, or even eliminated?

Spiritual blindness is an impairment of the mind that causes a person to lose sight of right judgement and truth. We are spiritually blind when we do not recognize God's presence and his wonderful work. We are spiritually blind when we do not recognize God's goodness in others and in ourselves. We are spiritually blind when we do not recognize the hurts and damage we cause to others and to ourselves.

In one way or another, all of us have some degree of spiritual blindness. St. Paul encourages us in the second reading to "take no part in the fruitless works of darkness" but to receive the light of Christ. St. Paul writes, "Live as children of light, for light produces every kind of goodness and righteousness and truth."

We pray that as the blind man in the gospel received his healing, our rulers and leaders whose blindness brings so much suffering in our society and in our world be healed of their blindness. Samuel was blind as to who to anoint the king of Israel until God guided him. May we receive God's guidance to see the paths forward even where there is dead-end. May the testimonies of our God's guidance and healing glorify his Holy Name. Amen.

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