

Read

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

Psalms 23:1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6

Ephesians 5:8-14

John 9:1-41 or 9:1, 6-9,
13-17, 34-38



REFLECTION

We can scoff at the disciples for assuming blindness was a punishment for sin, but are we all that different? Victim blaming is rampant in our culture: suffering comes from doing something wrong. We want to believe we can avoid suffering by making the right choices. The contrast between the blind man and the Pharisees reminds us that there are worse evils than pain and worse deprivations than loneliness. After his sight is restored, the once-blind man finds himself socially outcast for his faith in Christ. His testimony doesn't fit into the narrative the Pharisees have constructed to protect their own comfortable lives and beliefs. Even then, the newly sighted man remains grateful and worships Jesus. His physical blindness prepared the blind man to recognize the healing Christ came to offer; the Pharisee's selfishness and spiritual blindness prevented them from seeing what was happening right in front of them. Which is the greater deprivation?

QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ Why does Jesus tell the Pharisees that they would have no sin if they were blind?
- ❖ Can you think of some ways God has used painful experiences in your own life to draw you closer to him or to work toward his greater purpose?

LIVING THE WORD

Fourth Sunday of Lent

March 19, 2023

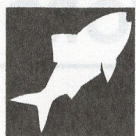


ACTION

In his book *Man's Search for Meaning*, Austrian psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl writes about the distinction between suffering and sacrifice. One way many Christians give meaning to suffering is by "offering it up" in prayer. Though the phrase can be overused, its deep meaning is to ask Jesus to turn our suffering into a source of spiritual graces or healing for others. This week, when you encounter hardship, practice offering it up to Jesus as a sacrifice for a person or cause you care about.



Watch Viktor Frankl speak about a meaningful life and religion: https://logotherapy.univie.ac.at/assets/vid/clip_ultimate_m.mp4



March 19, 2023

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

LECTIONARY #31A

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

Psalms 23:1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6

Ephesians 5:8-14

John 9:1-41 or 9:1, 6-9, 13-17, 34-38

Prepare for the Word

The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.

Leader's Context

In today's Gospel, Jesus performs a miracle and heals a man born blind. The details of the healing show us how Jesus is not a distant miracle worker, but God who reaches out and raises up those who are bowed down. He is not afraid to enter into the messiness of human life. When the religious leaders of the community hear that the man was healed by someone on the sabbath, they are upset. Instead of rejoicing in the miracle, they are stuck in the rules and regulations of honoring the sabbath. They miss the importance of what Jesus is revealing about himself—that he is the Son of Man, the foretold messiah.

Q FOCUS: *Miracles happen.*

Liturgical Calendar Connection

This week, we celebrate the solemnity of St. Joseph. His feast day is March 19, but it is moved this year to March 20 because March 19 is a Sunday. Joseph is Jesus' earthly foster father. As such, he is an important figure in our faith tradition because of his role in caring for the Holy Family. Joseph cared for Jesus and Mary, provided for Jesus, and taught him his trade of carpentry. Joseph is an example of the unconditional love expressed by parents and an example of an unwavering trust in God. We also celebrate the solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord on March 25. We celebrate when the angel Gabriel came to Mary to bring her the good news

that she was going to be the mother of Jesus, God's Son. Celebrating both Joseph and the Annunciation helps us to focus on the life of Jesus that we contemplate during Lent.

Church Teaching Connection

"Our lives are sometimes similar to that of the blind man who opened himself to the light, who opened himself to God, who opened himself to his grace. Sometimes unfortunately they are similar to that of the doctors of the law: from the height of our pride we judge others, and even the Lord! Today, we are invited to open ourselves to the light of Christ in order to bear fruit in our lives, to eliminate unchristian behaviors, behaviors that are sins" (Pope Francis, Angelus Message, March 30, 2014).

Hear the Word

Use this resource, a Lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.

Gospel Acclamation

Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.

Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ, king of endless glory.

Gospel

John 9:1, 6-9, 13-17, 34-38

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to John.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the Sign of the Cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.

As Jesus passed by he saw a man blind from birth. He spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva, and smeared the clay on his eyes, and said to him, "Go wash in the Pool of Siloam" — which means Sent — . So he went and washed, and came back able to see.

His neighbors and those who had seen him earlier as a beggar said, "Isn't this the one who used to sit and beg?" Some said, "It is," but others said, "No, he just looks like him." He said, "I am."

They brought the one who was once blind to the Pharisees. Now Jesus had made clay and opened his eyes on a sabbath. So then the Pharisees also asked him how he was able to see. He said to them, "He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and now I can see." So some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, because he does not keep the sabbath." But others said, "How can a sinful man do such signs?" And there was a division among them. So they said to the blind man again, "What do you have to say about him, since he opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet."

They answered and said to him, "You were born totally in sin, and are you trying to teach us?" Then they threw him out.

When Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, he found him and said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered and said, "Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?" Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." He said, "I do believe, Lord," and he worshiped him.

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone may be seated.

Reflect on the Word

When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:

"It's a miracle!" We hear this in movies or television shows, maybe in a dramatic scene where a dying patient's cancer disappears, or maybe in a flippant tone in a comedy where the character just got something they really wanted.

► **Do miracles still happen today? Have you or someone you know ever experienced a miracle?**

In this Gospel passage, Jesus heals a man who has been blind from birth. Jesus performs many miracles in the Gospels, and all of them are amazing. Miracles are a way to point toward the majesty and omnipotence of God and his divine intervention in the world. Miracles still happen today. Some might not be as dramatic as the story we hear today, while others are.

Only God can perform miracles, and so when we hear stories of Jesus performing miracles, it asserts his divinity. Jesus is God, and therefore Jesus can perform incredible feats of healing. In this passage, Jesus makes a paste of clay with his own saliva. He then rubs it onto the man's eyes. After this encounter, Jesus instructs the man to wash in the Pool of Siloam. After washing his face and eyes, the man can now see. Can you imagine the joy in the man's heart? Being born blind, never being able to see a sunset, a bird flying through the air, the delicious meal set before him and now, he can see! What an incredible miracle!

Not everyone agrees that this is an incredible miracle. The religious leaders, the Pharisees, are incredibly upset that someone has healed on the sabbath. The sabbath is to remain holy, and so they feel a healing is not to take place on this day of rest. And, as is the case in so many other stories, Jesus does not go along with tradition, especially when it means that he will heal someone, care for someone on the margins, or show the true way to follow him.

► **Can you describe a time when you or someone else went against the social norms and did God's work instead of what the world expected?**

We are not to be caught up in the rules and regulations. In fact, Jesus models something that Pope Francis calls "a culture of encounter." Jesus literally gets his hands dirty in this encounter. He could have healed the man from a distance; after all, he is God. However, he makes the clay and touches the man's eyes, those parts of him that are broken. Jesus is a model of what it means to care for the least of our sisters and brothers. He shows the disciples that healing the man is of utmost importance.

The man testifies to who heals him when confronted by the Pharisees. The Pharisees, however, are not moved by compassion for the man or for

Jesus. They detest that the formerly blind man is trying to teach them about a prophet named Jesus. When thrown out of the temple, however, he is not deterred. He still believes in Jesus' power and believes that Jesus is the Son of Man.

Wrapping It Up

Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the "Church Teaching Connection" on page 146.

Jesus heals a man who is blind from birth, doing so on the sabbath.

The Pharisees are caught up in the rules of their religion and are not focused on what truly matters to God.

The man who is healed by Jesus has a conversion experience; he now believes that Jesus is the Son of Man.

Act on the Word

Contemplating Miracles

For this activity, you will need to familiarize yourself with the Church's teaching about saints and miracles. Read through the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) website on this topic (<https://www.usccb.org/offices/public-affairs/saints>) and be prepared to discuss things with the teens. You will also need access to the internet or books about saints, or pages about saints printed from Catholic websites.

Begin by discussing the meaning of miracles. Miracles point to the existence of God working in our lives. Jesus performed miracles to show his power from God. Summarize for the young people what you

learned from the USCCB's website. Begin by defining and discussing the term *miracle*. (To clarify, "intercession" is a form of prayer, asking someone to pray to God on one's behalf.) Second, discuss the process of making a saint: the three steps of becoming a "venerable," then beatification, and finally canonization as described on the USCCB's website. Be sure to discuss the role of miracles in this process.

All saints have at least two miracles attributed to them (except for martyrs as mentioned above). Divide the young people into small groups and have them research some of the more recently named saints, blessed, or venerables. What miracles are attributed to them? How is their life an exemplary model of Christian discipleship? Each group can focus on a different person and then share what they learned with the larger group.

Closing Prayer

*In your goodness, O God,
you come into the lives of all those who
are burdened in life.*

*You sent your Son to give sight to the blind
and hope to those who long for your mercy.*

*Grant that we might see with our hearts
and give you praise with our lives.*

Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

For Next Sunday

To help teens prepare for next Sunday's Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the *handout* found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at www.lit.org/lwgr. Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends.