

Prayer at Home - 4th Sunday of Lent (Yr A)

Gather with family and/or friends or on your own. Place an open Bible on a table. Light a candle and place a crucifix beside it.

Begin with:

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

We hunger for the Bread of Life. Lord, be our nourishment:

I am the living bread, that came down from heaven, says the Lord.
Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever,
and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.

Let us prepare ourselves to truly hear God's Word:

I confess to almighty God and you here present,
That I have sinned through my own fault;
In my thoughts and in my words,
In what I have done and what I have failed to do;
And I ask blessed Mary, ever Virgin,
All the angels and saints,
And you here present to pray for me to the Lord our God.

May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins and
bring us to ever-lasting life.

Lord, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy
Lord, have mercy

Let us pray:

God our Creator,
Show forth your mighty works
In the midst of your people.

Enlighten your Church,
That we may know your Son
As the true light of the world
And through our worship confess him as Christ and Lord,
Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
Holy and mighty God for ever and ever. Amen

First Reading

Samuel 16:1, 6-7, 10-13 (JB)

A reading from the first book of Samuel

In the presence of the Lord God, they anointed David king of Israel.

The Lord said to Samuel, "Fill your horn with oil and go. I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem, for I have chosen myself a king among his sons." When Samuel arrived, he caught sight of Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed one stands there before him," but the Lord said to Samuel, "Take no notice of his appearance or his height for I have rejected him; God does not see as man sees; man looks at appearances but the Lord looks at the heart." Jesse presented his seven sons to Samuel, but Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen these." He then asked Jesse, "Are these all the sons you have?" He answered, "There is still one left, the youngest; he is out looking after the sheep." Then Samuel said to Jesse, "Send for him; we will not sit down to eat until he comes." Jesse had him sent for, a boy of fresh complexion, with fine eyes and pleasant bearing. The Lord said, "Come, anoint him, for this is the one." At this, Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him where he stood with his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord seized on David and stayed with him from that day on.

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 22 (JB)

R. The Lord is my shepherd;
there is nothing I shall want.

The Lord is my shepherd;
there is nothing I shall want.
Fresh and green are the pastures
where he gives me repose.
Near restful waters he leads me,
to revive my drooping spirit. **R.**

He guides me along the right path;
he is true to his name.
If I should walk in the valley of darkness
no evil would I fear.
You are there with your crook and your staff;
with these you give me comfort. **R.**

You have prepared a banquet for me
in the sight of my foes.
My head you have anointed with oil;
my cup is overflowing. **R.**

Surely goodness and kindness shall follow me
all the days of my life.
In the Lord's own house shall I dwell
for ever and ever. **R.**

Second Reading

Ephesians 5:8-14 (JB)

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Ephesians

Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.

You were darkness once, but now you are light in the Lord; be like children of light, for the effects of the light are seen in complete goodness and right living and truth. Try to discover what the Lord wants of you, having nothing to do with the futile works of darkness but exposing them by contrast. The things which are done in secret are things that people are ashamed even to speak of; but anything exposed by the light will be illuminated and anything illuminated turns into light. That is why it is said:

Wake up from your sleep,
rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Gospel Acclamation

John 8:12 (JB)

Glory to you, Word of God, Lord Jesus Christ!
I am the light of the world, says the Lord;
whoever follows me will have the light of life.
Glory to you, Word of God, Lord Jesus Christ!

Gospel

John 9:1-41 (JB)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

The blind man went off and washed himself and came away with his sight restored.

As Jesus went along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, for him to have been born blind?" "Neither he nor his parents sinned," Jesus answered, "he was born blind so that the works of God might be displayed in him.

As long as the day lasts
I must carry out the work of the one who sent me;
the night will soon be here when no one can work.
As long as I am in the world
I am the light of the world."

Having said this, he spat on the ground, made a paste with the spittle, put this over the eyes of the blind man and said to him, "Go and wash in the Pool of Siloam" (a name that means "sent"). So the blind man went off and washed himself, and came away with his sight restored.

His neighbours and people who earlier had seen him begging said, "Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?" Some said, "Yes, it is the same one." Others said, "No, he only looks like him." The man himself said, "I am the man." So they said to him, "Then how do your eyes come to be open?" "The man called Jesus" he answered "made a paste, daubed

my eyes with it and said to me, "Go and wash at Siloam"; so I went, and when I washed I could see." They asked, "Where is he?" "I don't know" he answered.

They brought the man who had been blind to the Pharisees. It had been a sabbath day when Jesus made the paste and opened the man's eyes, so when the Pharisees asked him how he had come to see, he said, "He put a paste on my eyes, and I washed, and I can see." Then some of the Pharisees said, "This man cannot be from God: he does not keep the sabbath." Others said, "How could a sinner produce signs like this?" And there was disagreement among them. So they spoke to the blind man again, "What have you to say about him yourself, now that he has opened your eyes?" "He is a prophet" replied the man.

However, the Jews would not believe that the man had been blind and had gained his sight, without first sending for his parents and asking them, "Is this man really your son who you say was born blind? If so, how is it that he is now able to see?" His parents answered, "We know he is our son and we know he was born blind, but we don't know how it is that he can see now, or who opened his eyes. He is old enough: let him speak for himself." His parents spoke like this out of fear of the Jews, who had already agreed to expel from the synagogue anyone who should acknowledge Jesus as the Christ. This was why his parents said, "He is old enough; ask him."

So the Jews again sent for the man and said to him, "Give glory to God! For our part, we know that this man is a sinner." The man answered, "I don't know if he is a sinner; I only know that I was blind and now I can see." They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" He replied, "I have told you once and you wouldn't listen. Why do you want to hear it all again? Do you want to become his disciples too?" At this they hurled abuse at him: "You can be his disciple," they said "we are disciples of Moses: we know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this man, we don't know where he comes from." The man replied, "Now here is an astonishing thing! He has opened my eyes, and you don't know where he comes from! We know that God doesn't listen to sinners, but God does listen to men who are devout and do his will. Ever since the world began it is unheard of for anyone to open the eyes of a man who was born blind; if this man were not from God, he couldn't do a thing." "Are you trying to teach us," they replied "and you a sinner through and through, since you were born!" And they drove him away.

Jesus heard they had driven him away, and when he found him he said to him, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" "Sir," the man replied "tell me who he is so that I may believe in him." Jesus said, "You are looking at him; he is speaking to you." The man said, "Lord, I believe", and worshipped him.

Jesus said:

"It is for judgement that I have come into this world, so that those without sight may see and those with sight turn blind."

Hearing this, some Pharisees who were present said to him, "We are not blind, surely?" Jesus replied: "Blind? If you were, you would not be guilty, but since you say, 'We see', your guilt remains."

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

Homily

This is a tale of two journeys: one a gradual movement towards the light, and the other a spiral into increasing blindness. The rhythm of John's storytelling is masterful. The ebb and flow of the drama serves to establish the direction of the major players, either towards or away from Jesus.

This event begins with a theological question. In first century Judaism, disability, disease and plague were regarded as signs of the terrible judgement of God. In the disciples' thinking, someone's sin is to blame for this man's blindness; Suffering is understood as divine punishment.

We like to think that we think in a more sophisticated way, but in reality, when things go wrong for us, we ask the same sorts of questions, "Why me?" or "What did I do to deserve this?" But that is part of the problem with suffering – there is no real answer as to why – "Why Me?" – "Why not me?" We might even entertain the thought that a worldwide pandemic is "divine retribution"; God placing a curse on an errant human race. But that is a twisted human logic; one that refuses to acknowledge God as the divine healer, the one of all-Compassion and Mercy.

What we do know is this: God does not want us to suffer. God does not wish suffering upon us. But maybe there is some connection to blindness and suffering. Maybe we don't see or cannot see God at work in the midst of our own pain and fear.

Part of the mystery about suffering is that it is deeply connected to love. Is suffering good? Not in itself, it isn't. Would we prefer not to suffer? Yes, but at what cost? What would we lose if we did not suffer?

And sometimes, it can be watching and carrying the suffering of others that can be most painful. We can feel helpless and useless.

Love and suffering are intertwined. One sure way to avoid suffering is to avoid love. The alternative would be to cling tightly to a cold and stony heart. Most of our art, music and pop culture is about this painful connection between love and suffering.

As C.S. Lewis wrote: "To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. To love is to be vulnerable."

And we might add, to be vulnerable is to suffer. Suffering can be fruitful. It can make spaces in our hearts that didn't exist previously. It can call us to know and offer forgiveness. It can make us humble and compassionate. Or, on the other hand, we can go into the darkness and become bitter, and selfish and hostile. We can be blinded by our pain, but equally, it can open our eyes to what ought to have been clear all along – that the more loving we are the more vulnerable we become.

These Lenten days have turned into very strange days indeed. Nevertheless, we are still heading towards the Easter mystery, when we are reminded that precisely because of his loving heart, Jesus did not turn away from suffering, but entered into it fully. God doesn't just know our suffering by loving us. God knows our suffering from the inside, as one who has suffered. Just like the gospel story, we have the choice to journey into light or

darkness; toward Jesus or away. On both sides of that story, we will need to confront the reality of human suffering; the reality of our suffering. Even if our doors are closed this day, let our eyes and hearts be open.

Apostles Creed

I believe in God,
the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
At the words that follow, up to and including 'the Virgin Mary', all bow.
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried;
he descended into hell;
on the third day he rose again from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty;
from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting. Amen.

Intro: Sisters and brothers, during this Lenten time, we seek to strengthen our trust in God's faithful promises.

For the Church;
that in this time of famine and isolation, we may grow evermore hungry for Jesus, the true Bread of Life. LORD, HEAR US.

For our world;
that our fears may not overwhelm us and that the well-being of the whole human family may be protected. LORD, HEAR US.

For our diocese;
that our communities may become the Bread of Life by supporting one another and caring for the most vulnerable and in need. LORD, HEAR US.

For those who work in government, healthcare and public service;
that by working together, the safety of all and the common good of society may be the fruits of their labours and the reward of their work. LORD, HEAR US.

For the isolated, elderly and frail;
that in these times of uncertainty, they may be strengthened by the prayers of the church. LORD OF LIFE, HEAR US.

Almighty and all-merciful God,
lover of the human race, healer of all our wounds,
in whom there is no shadow of death,
save us in this time of crisis;
grant wisdom and courage to our leaders;
watch over all medical people
as they tend the sick and work for a cure;
stir in us a sense of solidarity beyond all isolation;
if our doors are closed, let our hearts be open.
By the power of your love destroy the virus of fear,
that hope may never die
and the light of Easter, the triumph of life,
may shine upon us and the whole world.
Through Jesus Christ, the Lord risen from the dead,
who lives and reigns for ever and ever.
Amen.

*Holy Mary, health of the sick, pray for us.
St Joseph, guardian of us all, pray for us.*

At the Saviour's command and formed by divine teaching, we dare to say:

Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us,
and lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.

Deliver us, Lord, we pray, from every evil,
graciously grant peace in our days,
that, by the help of your mercy,
we may be always free from sin
and safe from all distress,
as we await the blessed hope
and the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

For the kingdom,
the power and the glory are yours
now and for ever.

Let us pray.

O God, who enlighten everyone who comes into this world,
illuminate our hearts, we pray,
with the splendour of your grace,
that we may always ponder
what is worthy and pleasing to you
and love you in all sincerity of heart.
Through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Lord God,
Strength of the weary, medicine of the weak,
Be near to us as we call on you.
May our nourishment during this time and renew us daily in your love.

May God bless us, keep us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.