

Dominica IV Quadragesimae "Laetare" A

Lectio Divina by Fr. Randy Soto

I. Lectio

A. Theme of the day: **Rejoice, for we are called to be Children of the Light**

1st Election and Anointing of David

2nd The chosen ones must walk as children of the light

Gospel Jesus heals the man born blind

B. Today is "Laetare Sunday." The word "laetare" in Latin means "be glad" or "rejoice." On this particular Sunday in Lent, there was a brief break in the Lenten season, a moment of refreshment amidst the rigors of the Lenten penance and fasting. The change in the color of vestments, from purple to rose, indicated that this Sunday was somewhat the same yet somewhat different from the other Sundays of Lent. Rose is a midway color between the purple of Lent and the bright white of Easter.

The invitation to "be glad" or "rejoice" causes us to reflect on the real reason for rejoicing even in Lent. Our true joy is anchored in Christ Our Lord and Savior, because by His Dying and Rising, He has freed us, saved us, redeemed us, from sin and eternal death.

C. Our First Reading comes from the First Book of Samuel. It recounts the story of King David's election and anointing by Prophet Samuel. God in his infinite wisdom decided to change the hereditary lineage of the messiah: King Saul had done what was wrong in the eyes of the Lord by disobeying God's commandments and by trusting more seers and nigromants than in YHWH. So Prophet Samuel was given the task to choose the new messiah, and inspired by the Lord he goes to the town of Bethlehem in Judah there to seek for the heir to the throne. His arrival to Jesse's abode causes great emotion and excitement; soon Jesse makes all his children appear in the presence of Samuel. All of them, despite their physical strength were not chosen. David, the youngest, was missing for he had gone out to tend to the sheep of his father Jesse. Upon his arrival "*Samuel anointed David in the midst of his brothers.*"

D. David was a shepherd. He was chosen to be the Messiah because he imitated best God's own solicitude for his people. This concept is expressed poetically in Ps 22 (23) which begins by declaring "*God is my Shepherd, there is nothing I shall want.*"

E. St. Paul exhorts the Ephesians "to be, therefore imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, even as Christ also loved you, and gave himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for an odor of a sweet smell" (Eph 5:1-2). Our Second Reading must be understood in light of this exhortation. Christians who have received Baptism cannot go back to live irresolute lives as those who live in darkness. The Light of the Risen Christ shines in the horizon of Easter, and we cannot shy away from it. This light will make manifest all our sins so Paul is calling us to conversion: "*Arise from the dead and Christ will give you light.*"

F. The episode of the man born blind in Jn 9:1-41 develops extensively the theme of Christ as the Light of the world. In a well knit construction that echoes the eagle flight (ascending spiral) John brings about seven scenes:

- a. Healing of the blind man 9:1-7; *Jesus heals the man.*
- b. Interrogation by neighbors 9:8-12; *where is he? I don't know.*
- c. 1st interrogation by the Pharisees 9:13-17; *He is a prophet*
- d. Interrogation of the parents 9:18:23; *Jesus the Christ*
- e. 2nd interrogation of the Pharisees 9:24-34; *Do you want to be his disciples?*
- f. The man gains spiritual sight 9:35-38; *Lord, I believe.*
- g. Spiritual blindness of the Pharisees 9:39-41; *Your guilt remains.*

G. Light is another important symbol in John's Gospel. Like water, the theme of the light runs through the book of signs: 1:4,5,7,8(2x),9; 3:19(2x),20(2x),21; 5:35; 8:12(2x); 9:5; 11:9,10; 12:35(2x),36(3x),46. Light as a symbol is contrasted against darkness and sets the stage for the struggle between light and darkness in the Gospel. Light is associated with the Word, while darkness is often identified with the world and the ruler of the world (12:31). Just as physical light dispels darkness in nature, so also is the case in this struggle between light and darkness in the Gospel.

III. *Meditatio*

A. The miracle described in today's Gospel is even more remarkable than it might seem at first. St Basil and other Fathers tell us that this was not just a case of giving sight to a blind man born with eyes that did not function, but to someone who had no eyes at all!

B. God's sight is not like ours, he looks at the heart of men and not at their appearance. This is perhaps the main teaching of the First Reading. God calls David because he is the only one doing what the Lord needs for his people: he is shepherding the flock. The King God wants for Israel is a Good Shepherd.

B. Ps 22 describes the qualities of a Good Shepherd. He must lead the sheep into verdant pastures of faith and hope; he must quench their thirst with the waters of Torah and Logos; with his staff he must protect the flock from the insidious enemy; on a table he must serve the meal and be the meal himself; he anoints each sheep to prepare them for their final journey into the Heavenly abode.

C. Christ is the Good Shepherd that guides us out from the dark valleys into the plains of his radiant light. Now, in order to celebrate and to live Easter, we must open our eyes to see that Light of the Risen Christ. Christ is about to open our eyes to see in profundity the mystery of his love.

D. The moral consequences of Christ's actions imply that we should live in accordance to this New Light; we must never go back into the darkness of our sins.

III. Oratio

We begin our celebration with Isaiah's invitation to rejoice: *"Rejoice, Jerusalem! Be glad for her, you who love her; rejoice with her, you who mourned for her, and you will find contentment at her consoling breasts,"* Isa 66:10-11 (EA). This tone of joy is maintained through-out the whole celebration: *"We are joyful in your Word, your Son Jesus Christ, who reconciles us to you. Let us hasten toward Easter with the eagerness of faith and love."* (OP); *"Lord, we offer you these gifts which bring us peace and joy. Increase our reverence by this Eucharist, and bring salvation to the world"* (PG). Today's preface makes evident the connection between the Light of the Resurrection on the waters of Baptism *"Through Adam's fall we were born as slaves to sin, but now through baptism in Christ we are reborn as your adopted children"* (Preface). At communion while receiving the Eucharist we echo the testimony of the man born blind Gospel: *"The Lord rubbed my eyes: I went away and washed; then I could see, and I believed in God"* (CA). We conclude our celebration reiterating that we need Christ Light in us so that we may achieve love, hope and joy: *"You enlighten all who come into the world. Fill our hearts with the light of your gospel that our thoughts may please you, and our love be sincere"* (AC).

III. Contemplatio

A. Let us meditate with the wisdom of our Catechism (CCE §§ 1214-1216): This sacrament is called *Baptism*, after the central rite by which it is carried out: to baptize (Greek *baptizein*) means to "plunge" or "immerse"; the "plunge" into the water symbolizes the catechumen's burial into Christ's death, from which he rises up by resurrection with him, as "a new creature." This sacrament is also called *"the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit,"* for it signifies and actually brings about the birth of water and the Spirit without which no one "can enter the kingdom of God." "This bath is called *enlightenment*, because those who receive this [catechetical] instruction are enlightened in their understanding. . . ." Having received in Baptism the Word, "the true light that enlightens every man," the person baptized has been "enlightened," he becomes a "son of light," indeed, he becomes "light" himself: *"Baptism is God's most beautiful and magnificent gift [...] we call it gift, grace, anointing, enlightenment, garment of immortality, bath of rebirth, seal, and most precious gift. It is called gift because it is conferred on those who bring nothing of their own; grace since it is given even to the guilty; Baptism because sin is buried in the water; anointing for it is priestly and royal as are those who are anointed; enlightenment because it radiates light; clothing since it veils our shame; bath because it washes; and seal as it is our guard and the sign of God's Lordship"* (St. Gregorius of Nazianzus, Oratio 40,3-4: PG 36, 361C).

B. Following the tradition of Dionysius and St. Thomas Aquinas let us contemplate the titles given to Jesus in this passage: Throughout the story of the healing of the blind man, the Evangelist registers various titles, adjectives and names given to Jesus by a host of people, the disciples, the Evangelist himself, the blind man, the Pharisees and Jesus himself. Here are some of the names, adjectives and titles. The list shows the progression of the blind man in faith as his vision becomes clear.

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| 1. | Rabbi (master) (Jn. 9:1): the disciples |
| 2. | Light of the world (Jn 9:5): Jesus |
| 3. | The One sent (Jn 9:7): the Evangelist |
| 4. | Man (Jn 9:11): the healed man |
| 5. | Jesus (Jn 9:11): the healed man |
| 6. | Does not come from God (Jn 9:16): some Pharisees |
| 7. | Prophet (Jn 9:17): the healed man |
| 8. | Christ (Jn 9:22): the people |
| 9. | Sinner (Jn 9:24): some Pharisees |
| 10. | We do know where he comes from (Jn 9:31): the healed man |
| 11. | Religious (Jn 9:31): the healed man |
| 12. | Does the will of God (Jn 9:31): the healed man |
| 13. | Son of man (Jn 9:35): Jesus |
| 14. | Lord (Jn 9:36): the healed man |
| 15. | Lord, I believe! (Jn 9:30): the healed man |