

OUR LADY OF PROVIDENCE CHAPEL
SAINT VINCENT HOSPITAL
WORCESTER MEDICAL CENTER
Fourth Sunday in Lent—Laetare Sunday
March 10, 2024



The Son of Man – the Bronze Serpent – Nicodemus – Eternal Life

“When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I AM (Jn 8:28).” In Numbers 21:4-9, the one who saves is God by means of the snake. In John, the one who saves is God by means of Jesus who goes out of his way to choose it to help Nicodemus

CHAPEL SCHEDULE

Weekday Mass: (Monday-Friday at 12 noon)

Weekend Masses: Saturday: 4:00pm - Sunday: 7:30am & 4:00pm

Holyday Mass Schedule: afternoon prior at 4:00pm

Holy day proper at 12 noon and 4:00pm

Confessions: First Saturday of every month at 3:30pm

Department Telephone: 508.363.6246

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MASS INTENTIONS — LITURGICAL SCHEDULE

- Saturday, March 9 *Vigil of the 4th Sunday of Lent*
4:00pm For a personal intention
- Sunday, March 10 *Fourth Sunday of Lent - Laetare Sunday*
7:30am For the health of a devout Catholic
4:00pm +Marilyn Beal
- Monday, March 11
12:00nn For those living the monastic life
- Tuesday, March 12
12:00nn +Father Walter Riley
- Wednesday, March 13
12:00nn For a special intention
- Thursday, March 14
12:00nn Seeking God's help for Caid and Max
- Friday, March 15 *Day of Abstinence*
11:30am Stations of the Cross
12:00nn For Danielle
- Saturday, March 16 *Vigil of the 5th Sunday of Lent*
4:00pm +Madeline Sullivan
- Sunday, March 17 *Fifth Sunday of Lent*
7:30am +John & Mary Murray by their family
4:00pm +Madeline Sullivan

The Key to Understanding the Day's Liturgical Significance: *Sunday is the day that the Church celebrates the Paschal mystery—the Lord's Day—which, according to apostolic tradition, is the day of Christ's Resurrection. The Sundays of Advent, Lent, and during the Easter Season take precedence over other celebrations. Solemnities honor significant religious events, beliefs or saints of the greatest importance and universal in their observance that begin at Vespers (or Evening Prayer) the day before. Feasts must be observed, though, less important than solemnities, hence, feasts are only observed on the natural day. Memorials are of two types: Either the observance is an obligatory memorial¹ or an optional memorial².*

Toward a Better Understanding of the Gospels of Lent

The Gospel is taken from the end of a longer conversation between Jesus and a Pharisee named Nicodemus. It begins with drawing an analogy between an earlier event from a time when Moses "lifted up the serpent in the desert" which, then, points toward the future when "the Son of Man [will] be lifted up (Gk. ὑψωσεν)." This lifting up, in the Johannine vocabulary, is an explicit reference to Jesus hanging on the Cross. Because of those analogies, the Cross is the supreme manifestation of the Lord's glorification, not only because it marks the hour when evil was vanquished, but after having received the Spirit from the Father, Christ's actually being obedient beams forth from the Cross, too. During their wanderings in the desert, though God had freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, the people rebelled against God and Moses (Num 21:4-5). As a punishment for their sins, God sent seraph serpents among the people whose venomous bites proved to be deadly. The people repented and, after conversing with God, Moses "made a bronze serpent and mounted it on a pole" (Num 21: 8). If bitten, through gazing up at that mounted image, they would not die from the venomous bite. When the Savior was raised up on the Cross, by looking up at Christ Crucified, eternal life will be given by doing so. After having died on the Cross, witnessing blood and water flowing from the Lord's wounded side, this scriptural passage was fulfilled, "They will look upon him whom they have pierced" (Jn 19:37). The act of *looking upon* (Gk. σπουταί) is another part of John's vocabulary. The Greek word *opsantai* implies *to see with the mind or to spiritually see*. In referring to eternal life, in the Fourth Gospel, heavenly or eternal life is not something yet-to-come after death because that blessed way of living is already a present reality. Then, Saint John states that condemnation was not the reason that God sent His Son into the world, because the Father did so in order "that the world might be saved through him." Salvation alone was the sole purpose for which Christ came and not judgment or condemnation. Those two propositions, one positive and the other negative, actually reinforce one another. Is there no judgment, then, by God? The reference to the bronze serpent reminds those who fool themselves by thinking that all is well serves as a stark reminder that there will be consequences for sin. Those who looked upon the bronze serpent were spared death, whereas those who did not doomed themselves to die, in

Georges Bernanos—*La Joie*

Only the blind of spirit believe that evil is known to those wretches alone who let themselves, little by little, be devoured by it...Only a certain purity, a certain simplicity, the divine ignorance of saints, catching evil off its guard, can penetrate its thickness, penetrate the thickness of immemorial deceit. To know man's truth one must, through a miracle of compassion, embrace his pain, and what does it matter whether one knows its impure source or not? "All I know about sin," the Saint of Ars would say, "I have learned from the lips of sinners." And what had he heard, the venerable and sublime child, among all those shameful confidences, all the inexhaustible babble, but the groan and death rattle of spent passion that in the end breaks the hardest hearts.

And can any understanding of evil equal insight into pain? Is there anything that can go beyond pity?

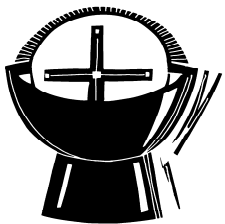
spite of the availability of a way to be saved from dying. Equally so—and even more so—is that so much truer with Christ. Sent by the Father, Jesus was raised up on the Cross, so that those who gaze upon Him and believe that He is the Son of God will live and not die. Christ's paschal mystery—His life, death, resurrection, and ascension—brought divine Light into the world which remains universally available. Yet, each individual has to be drawn to live in the Light of Christ and to eschew the darkness of sin. The titanic struggle between light and darkness allows for no middle ground – a choice must be made between those two. Scholars describe the overall character of Saint John's Gospel in terms of a lawsuit against Jesus. Thus, like any court proceeding, those who listen to the Fourth Gospel must choose one side or the other in that trial. Either Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life and, by believing that to be so, those who do believe it do so by accepting the offer of salvation. Only by believing that Christ is the Light that came into the world is salvation possible, whereas those who do not believe that to be true have no other choice than to align themselves with darkness, evil deeds, and unending death. In the divine plan of creation, God created Adam and Eve. The Creator endowed them with free will and placed them in a verdant garden, which God entrusted into their keeping. There were two exceptions that were off-limits for their use: the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Tree of Life. Tempted by Satan, they defied God and committed the original sin and, so, broke the covenant God had made with them. Unlike His creatures, God remained faithful to humanity and kept His word. In what has come to be known as the *protoevangelium* or the first hint of the Gospel, God said, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; they will strike at your head, while you strike at their heel" (Gen 3:15). The verse introduces two elements previously unknown in the Garden of Eden, elements that are the basis of Christianity—the curse imposed on mankind because of Adam's sin and God's provision for a Savior from sin who would take that curse upon Himself. Through a series of covenants, whether with Abraham, Noah, or Moses, by means of natural disasters like the flood or manifested in life-giving interventions such as the parting of the Red Sea, God never wavered in His plan of salvation. When the Israelites chased after false gods, He sent the prophets to warn them that they were facing calamity if they veered from the path He had set before them. Repeatedly ignoring those classical prophets, the God of Israel punished the people's arrogance with their Exile in Babylon being the result. In a foreign land, with God patiently awaiting for signs of a change of heart, they reread the Mosaic Law and came to a better understanding of its meaning. Even with the Temple destroyed, dwelling among pagans, the Israelites believed God was still with them. His Chosen People came to a more spiritual understanding of worship and, eventually, they returned to their homeland. In the ultimate act of salvation, God sent his only Son and, once lifted high on the Cross, both then and now, those who gaze upon Christ Crucified and believe that He is alive forevermore, disciples like that will not be condemned.

National Eucharistic Revival — Lent & Forgiveness in the Eucharist

According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, when we receive Communion, "...the Eucharist cannot unite us to Christ without at the same time cleansing us from past sins and preserving us from future sins" (CCC, n. 1393).

Jesus made this Eucharist-forgiveness connection at the Last Supper when He took a cup of wine and said, "This is my blood ... which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins" (Mt 26:28). The earliest Christian believers considered the gift of forgiveness in the Eucharist to be a foundational belief: "by his blood, to prove his righteousness because of the forgiveness of sins previously committed" (Rom 3:25); "the blood of his Son Jesus cleanses us from all sins" (1 Jn 1:7); and, "to him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood" (Rev 1:5). It is important to make this distinction when it comes to the type of forgiveness granted through the reception of the Eucharist: venial sins are forgiven, but mortal sins are not. The *Catechism* affirms that, "The Eucharist is not ordered to the forgiveness of mortal sins—that is proper to the sacrament of Reconciliation" (CCC, n. 1395). In receiving

Communion, Jesus extends His love and life to those who receive, which is coupled with compassion, mercy, healing grace, pardon and peace. In that heavenly food, He offers the communicant these blessings: a new beginning, grace in the battle against future sin, and nourishes those who receive with the ability to live a virtuous and holy life.



Catechumenal Gospel of the Man Born Blind - 4th Sunday of Lent

To a certain degree, in John's Gospel, Jesus is portrayed as a lonely hero. In this Gospel, the disciples (or the Twelve) make a rare appearance as a group, though they prove to be of little help to Jesus when they "passed by... a man blind from birth." Having never been able to see, this man's life-long deficit compounds the situation Jesus encountered. It also magnifies the importance of the restoration of his sight. The disciples want to look back and discover whether the blindness was caused by the man's sin or the sin of his parents. After dismissing their search for prior guilt as an explanation, Jesus looks forward to curing the man, "while it is day." The bright part of day is the opportune time for God to work and bring about actual healing or spiritual insight. Jesus repeats one of His seven *ego eimi* (Gk. ἐγώ εἰμι) statements: "I am the light of the world." This declaration is something He had said earlier (Jn 8:12). However, claiming to be the light of the world should bring the astute listener back to the opening chapter of Saint John's Gospel called the Prologue. There, the pre-existent Word is "The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world" (Jn 1:9). Such a new dawn brings true light into the world's darkness. The contrast between light and darkness is earlier aligned with judging, first mentioned in regard to Nicodemus (Jn 3:1-21). In that chapter, there is a shift from dialogue to monologue and Jesus declared what while "the light came into the world... people preferred darkness to light, because their works were evil" (Jn 3:19). The daytime or light is the present in which Jesus is active on earth starkly contrasted with the night when He has left the world. This light vs. darkness, presence vs. absence is also part of the final catechumenal Gospel or the Raising of Lazarus (Jn 11:1-44). Subsequently, Jesus makes it clear that all those who believe in Him continue to walk in the light, even if surrounded by darkness in the world around them. This extensive back-and-forth exchange exhibits a structure scholars call *chiasmus* in which each scene in the first half of the passage has a matching scene in the second half. The structure of a chiasm is usually expressed through a series of letters, each letter denoting a new idea. For example, the structure ABBA refers to two ideas (A and B) repeated in reverse order (B' and A'). The common saying "When the going gets tough, the tough get going" is chiasmic. The words going and tough are repeated, in reverse order, in the second half of the sentence or ABBA. The cure of the Man Born Blind is a more complex chiasm: ABCD C'B'A' or Jesus, the disciples & blind man (A), the man and his neighbors (B), the man and the Pharisees (C), the Jews and the man's parents (D), then, the man and the Pharisees (C'), Jesus and the man (B'), and Jesus and the Pharisees (A'). Another form is the *interrupted chiasmus* or ABXB. In that structure, another idea (or X) is inserted in the middle of the repetition: ABXB. The two ideas (A and B) are repeated in reverse order, but that third idea is inserted before the repetition identified by X takes place. By virtue of its central position, the insertion is emphasized in importance. This cate-

chumenal Gospel begins and ends with a striking contrast between Jesus and His interlocutors. At the start, the contrast is between Jesus and the disciples, who exhibit the traditional prejudice that such a life-long blindness must be due to sin, either the man's own or that of his parents. The disciples are the ones who want to treat this man as an exercise in theological reflection. Similarly, at the end, Jesus' approach starkly contrasts with the religious 'puritanism' of the Pharisees. In the middle of the extensive narrative, there are two encounters between Jesus and the man himself, engaged in a typical Johannine one-on-one conversation. The first time, Jesus heals the man, and the second time the Lord invites him into relationship with Him as a disciple. The blind man is a real and well-rounded character, who displays courage, wisdom, and wit. He is certainly not at the margins of this narrative.

Implications of the Gospel

The first stage of the Christian journey is life before an encounter with Christ, as was exhibited in the man born blind before meeting Jesus. The Lord's disciples question Him about the man's blindness and ask Jesus whose sin it was that caused it. Jesus is firm in pointing out to them that it was not the man's personal sin nor that of his parents as the cause of the blindness. Rather, Jesus, points out that the blindness, though not caused by personal sin nor a punishment inflicted on him by God is something that serves a greater purpose. Though God never wills the suffering of anyone, both suffering and natural evil exist in the world due to our fallen human nature through the sin of Adam and Eve. So, this man's blindness is a result of being part of a fallen world, not the result of personal sin. Jesus also points out that blindness has a greater purpose: revealing God's incredible work through his healing by Jesus that soon happens in the exchange with the Lord. When traditionally understood, the man's blindness symbolizes original sin: the sin every human who ever existed inherited from Adam and Eve when they sinned for the first time in the Garden of Eden. That first or original sin resulted in Adam and Eve becoming blind, in a spiritual sense. Remember that at the beginning of the book of Genesis, Adam and Eve chose to disobey God by eating of the fruit that was explicitly forbidden for them to eat. They chose to turn inward toward themselves to determine what was good and evil rather than trusting in God the Father. In turning away from God and sinning in this way, they no longer were able to see God in the way they could before the Fall and, so, were cast out of paradise. Being humanity's first parents, they passed on that original sin to all their descendants, including each and every person throughout all of history, even until the present day. As a result, when each one of us was born, we were blind in a spiritual sense because of the original sin we inherited from Adam and Eve. We were like the man who was blind from birth, we were unable to spiritually see God — seemingly born on the wrong planet! Excerpted from Ian Paul. "Jesus heals the man born blind" www.psephizo.com. 14 March 2023.