

**Homily of Bishop Robert P. Deeley, JCD**  
**4<sup>th</sup> Sunday Lent (A) March 22, 2020**  
**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, Portland**  
**Samuel 16: 1b, 6-7,10-13a; Eph 5:8-14; Jn 9: 1-41**

Good morning. It is good to be with you this morning. I am so grateful for the possibility of gathering us together for this Mass. Though we would certainly prefer to be in a full church, I appreciate that this technology does allow us to draw together in community and raise our minds and hearts to God in praise and supplication. We ask Him in this Mass to watch over us and keep us safe. We remind ourselves in our gathering that God is with us. He will never abandon us. We are in a time of crisis but we firmly believe this. God is with us.

During this week, like many of you, I spent a lot of time on the telephone. It allows us to keep the distance that we are suggested to maintain in our social distancing, but it also allows us to be with the people that are important to our lives. Social distancing challenges us to be creative in the ways we stay connected. In one conversation, I was talking to a friend. He told me he keeps on hoping that he will wake up and come to know that all the disastrous dislocation that has been caused by this COVID-19 disease is a bad dream. And then he realizes he is not asleep, and all this is very real. Indeed, it is, and, given the dangers connected to this coronavirus, it is all very necessary. In taking the measures we have taken, we are following the advice of those we trust in medicine and public safety. Controlling a disease which has no known cure requires us to lessen the possibility of becoming infected in the first place. And so, we do what we are asked. This Mass is a part of that advice. It reminds us that, even though we cannot gather this morning in our parish churches as we would prefer, we can still be together, though virtually, and pray together and draw strength from our prayer and our deep conviction that Jesus the Lord is present in our prayer and strengthens us in this time of grave difficulty. And though we cannot see one another through this live stream, we know we are present to each other and strengthened by the conviction that the love of God in Jesus binds us together and calls us to care for each other.

In our prayer today, it seems to me that we should be particularly mindful of those who are caring for us and are working so hard to deal with this pandemic and its

consequences. I am particularly mindful of our health and medical workers, doctors and nurses, and those who assist them in our hospitals, nursing homes and medical offices. We pray for their safety and wellbeing. We are also mindful of the great service given by our first responders in police and fire and all those watching over our public safety. Our elected officials and those who assist them in carrying out their duty to the public are also serving us as they work to deal with this pandemic. We pray that the Spirit of God will guide them in their decisions and help them to keep the good of all before them in giving their guidance.

And, as I ask for prayers for the many who assist us and keep us safe in the public sphere, I cannot forget to ask for the same for our priests and deacons, our parish and diocesan staffs. They are so dedicated in their care for all of us. This has been a time of tremendous upheaval. Two weeks ago, we were focused on Lent and its beautiful devotion and prayer and looking forward to the celebration of Holy Week and Easter. In these last ten days, our lives and our ministries have become upended. Happily, though, each day, I see highlighted, through our Communications Office, the dedication of those who serve us. Priests are seeking ways of remaining connected with their people online and on the telephone, and hearing confessions in parking lots, leading prayers online and offering courses in the same way. School principals are gathering the children for prayer at the beginning of the school day through the technology that is available to them. The prayer begins the lessons of the day trying to keep the education of the children moving forward. Our diocesan staff is seeking ways to help with employment issues and the challenging financial situation in which we find ourselves. Faith formation leaders are posting opportunities for families to pray, learn, and connect with God and one another in this time. There is much that is good that is happening. We pray that God will continue to guide us and help us to strengthen each other.

As I ask for prayers for our priests and all who help them in our parishes, I also want to remind you that without a Sunday Mass they do not have the weekly collection which is the major support of our parishes. These are difficult times, and many are finding themselves challenged financially. Jobs have been lost and businesses closed. COVID-19 has created a major financial challenge around the world. Some of us,

however, are able to continue to help our parishes to remain open and do the work of God that is theirs. I invite you to check the online site of your parish to see the ways in which you can help. It will be much appreciated.

We are gathered here this morning for Mass. And we have been lifted up by the scripture readings. Today is Laetare Sunday. You may have noticed that the color scheme has changed. We wear rose vestments instead of the purple of Lent. That change gives us a hint of what we are waiting for – the joy of Easter. The liturgy today begins with the word: *Laetare* – rejoice. We are invited to rejoice because there is something joyful that gives us hope as we head toward Easter. What gives us hope is the promise of Easter, and its new life. Today, however, we remain in Lent. It is our time of preparation for the wonder of Easter. And it may be a bit difficult for us to find the hope that the celebration promises but I think it is there if we are attentive to what God speaks to us in His word today.

The Gospel story this morning tells of a blind man who is healed by the Lord Jesus. The story begins, “As Jesus passed by, he saw a man blind from birth.” In some miracle stories, we find Jesus being approached by a person desperate for a cure for themselves or someone close to them. Jesus recognizes faith in the person making the request of him and cures that person. Here, the case is different – The cure comes by Jesus’ own initiative. He sees a need and responds to someone whom he sees as hurting who has made no request.

It is, in its own way, God’s way with us. Why did he send Jesus into the world? To be the revelation of the Father’s love. In this instance, Jesus re-creates this poor, needy human being with the gift of light. To some extent, God’s relationship with his people throughout the history of the Old Testament is a story of God giving light to a people showing them how to live, and how to be in relationship with him. When Jesus comes into our world he calls himself “light for the world.” He comes to show us the love God has for us, and the way we might respond to the Father’s love.

But what I think is particularly interesting in this story is what happens to the man who is cured, to the one who is able now to see. When he is first asked about his healing, he tells those who ask that he was healed by “the *man* called Jesus”. Not

wanting to believe his account the questioners badger the healed man and criticize him. As the man talks about the miracle, he understands more who it is who has healed him. He calls Jesus a man sent by God. The crowd rejects the man throwing him out of the community. Jesus returns to talk with him. In that conversation the man becomes a believer. “I do believe, Lord’, and he worshipped him.”

The healed blind man is a model of growth in faith. He teaches us. As he passes on the story of his own personal healing by Jesus, he comes to a deeper faith himself in Jesus. He learns by sharing his own experience of faith. Even though he encounters difficulty and rejection, he also comes to know a new peace in his healing and acceptance by Jesus.

In the truth of the blind man’s experience is our hope, my friends. To the degree that I speak what I believe in my words and actions, I will come to know the loving presence of the Lord Jesus more deeply in my own life. In these days of our social distancing and sheltering at home we can still live out our faith by the care we give to each other.

Who needs help? Who can I call who might be lonely? Who am I protecting by maintaining this social distancing when I would rather be moving about? Who can I offer this Rosary for? In all these ways we speak our faith in our actions. When we do, I pray that our own experience is that of the healed blind man. May we know in faith that, despite our difficulties, God is with us in Jesus’ presence with us.

“Wherever there is love, there is God.” That is our hope.

May we know the protection of our Blessed Mother in these days as we ask her to commend us to her Son, Jesus Christ, in this our time of great need.