

THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT, Year A
1 Sam 16:1,6-7,10-13; Ps 23:1-6; Eph 5:8-14; Jn 9:1-41

THE SECOND SCRUTINY

Homily by Fr. Michael A. Van Sloun
Sunday, March 26, 2006, 11:15 a.m. Mass
Sunday, March 14, 2010, 11:00 a.m. Mass

This Sunday's gospel, the healing of the blind man,
is the **second** of a threesome,
the **middle event** of a **triple header**.

Q: Can anyone give us the name or topic of **last week's** gospel?

A: The **woman at the well** (Jn 4:5-42).

Q: Does anyone know **next week's** gospel?

It's a long one like today.

A: The raising of **Lazarus** (Jn 11:1-45).

The gospels for weeks Three, Four, and Five of Lent are all closely connected.
There is a **common thread** that ties them together,
the woman at the well last week,
the blind man this week,
and the raising of Lazarus next week.

In every one of these gospels,
there is a person who comes to **believe in Jesus Christ**
and then makes a powerful **declaration of faith** about him.

Last week the **woman at the well** grew tremendously in her faith.
She began by disparagingly calling Jesus, "**You, a Jew**" (Jn 4:9);
but then she shifted her tone to a respectful form of address, "**Sir**" (Jn 4:11,15,19);
and then she upgraded when she called him "**a prophet**" (Jn 4:19);
and then, yet stronger, she called Jesus "**the Messiah**" (Jn 4:29);
and to finish, the townsfolk said, "this is the **Savior of the world**" (Jn 4:42).

The blind man began by calling Jesus "**that man**" (Jn 9:11);
but then, like the woman at the well, he changed and called Jesus "**a prophet**" (Jn 9:19);
and he finished by calling Jesus "**Lord**" (Jn 9:38).

Next week, when we hear the raising of Lazarus,
Martha will make a remarkable statement.
Speaking directly to Jesus, Martha will say to him,
"**Lord, I have come to believe that you are the Messiah,**
the Son of God,
the one who is coming into the world" (Jn 11:27).

We have three different weeks, three different people, three powerful professions of faith. These stories describe marvelous conversion experiences, instances when someone's faith has grown tremendously.

For many centuries these three famous gospels have been used to welcome new members into the Church.

Here at St. Stephen's, we are in the process of welcoming new members into the Church, a process that will come to its completion at the Easter Vigil in three weeks, and we are using this set of three conversion gospels to accompany our RCIA Elect and Candidates over the last leg of the journey because they are growing in faith much like the biblical figures of old.

At the Easter Vigil, every Elect, every Candidate, will make a declaration of faith, just like the woman at the well, the blind man, and Martha.

The **woman at the well** declared, "*He [Jesus] is a prophet, the MESSIAH, the SAVIOR of the world*" (Jn 4:19,29,42). The **blind man** declared, "*He is a prophet*" (Jn 9:17); and, "*I do believe, LORD*" (Jn 9:38). **Martha** declared, "*You [Jesus] are the MESSIAH, the SON of GOD*" (Jn 11:27).

But those three professions of faith took place long ago. That was then; this is now. Now it is time for us to be bold and declare ourselves for Jesus.

The time is almost here for our **Elect**, those who are unbaptized, to stand before this Community of Faith and declare, with great conviction, "**I believe in Jesus,**" and then be baptized.

And it is almost time for our **Candidates**, those who are coming from different faith traditions, from different Christian denominations, to stand before us and declare with great conviction, "**I believe in Jesus**" and "**I want to be a full member of the Catholic Church,**" and then come into **Full Communion** with us.

And, it is almost time for those **Candidates** who have not yet completed their **Sacraments of Initiation**, who have not yet received their First Eucharist, or who have not yet been Confirmed, to stand before us and declare with great conviction, "**I believe in Jesus**" and "**I want to make an adult-level faith commitment in the Catholic Church.**"

And once the Elect are baptized at the Easter Vigil,
and once the Candidates have been received, it's not over.

On **Easter Sunday**, and for **every Sunday** throughout the **Easter season**,
all of us will be asked to **renew** our **baptismal vows**.

The **renewal** of our **baptismal vows** is an awesome opportunity for all of us
to stand before this community and make a **public declaration** of our faith,
for us to **say with great conviction**:

*“I believe in God the Father,
and I believe in Jesus who is the Christ,
and I believe in the Holy Spirit,
and I believe in the Catholic Church.”*

At this liturgy we celebrate the **Second Scrutiny** for our **Elect**.
Scrutiny means to **search** one's self, to **look** closely, to **examine**,
to get rid of all that blinds us,
to see what is sinful,
to expel all that is evil,
to be cured of our spiritual ills,
and to heal the deadly wound of sin.

But this is **not just for the Elect**.
It is also **for everyone** in this Assembly.
All of us here need to be healed of our blindness,
To be healed of our refusal to see and admit our sin.
Once cured by Jesus, we can **live in the light**.

The **Second Scrutiny** that we are about to celebrate
does not take place behind closed doors.
It is **not** a **private** affair.
It is a **community event** because we need to **support our Elect**,
and, as we witness their growing faith,
hopefully **our own faith** will be **strengthened**.

These Elect and Candidates have a right to expect a lot from us.
If **they** are **joining** the **Church**, the Body of Christ, **our community**,
they deserve a **special welcome** and **extra care**.

We know how this works in other areas of life.
When a **new baby** is born, it immediately becomes a full member of the family,
and it is a source of great joy,
but the baby deserves and has a right to a lot of extra care and attention.
When a **new employee** starts a new job, if it is a good company, a good organization,
it will welcome the new worker, provide orientation,
transition assistance, and lots of friendly on-the-job training.

As our **RCIA Elect** join the Church,
they deserve an **especially warm welcome** and a little **extra TLC**.

We **welcome them** with our blessings, applause, kind comments, and hospitality.

We **teach them** with our example, the Liturgy of the Word,

Breaking Open the Word, special classes, and so on.

We **support them** with our prayers.

We **walk with them**.

As they try to draw closer to God,

we try to draw closer to God.

As they try to get rid of sin in their lives,

we try to get rid of sin in our lives.

As they try to live more fully in the Light of Christ,

we try to live more fully in the Light of Christ.

Let us **now celebrate** the **Rite of Scrutiny**,

in which we **encourage** our **Elect**,

as we walk our own journeys of faith,

and with **new eyes**, cured of blindness,

we will **see** what is **evil** in ourselves and around us, **remove it**,

so our **Elect**, and all of us, will **live in the Light**.