

Catechists and Teachers
Lectionary
Fourth Sunday of Lent – Year A
April 3, 2011

Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for this session read all the readings.

1 Samuel 16:1, 6–7, 10–13

Psalm 23:1–3, 3–4, 5, 6

Ephesians 5:8–14

John 9:1–41 [or (short form) 9:1, 6–9, 13–17, 34–38]

Spend a few minutes reflecting of what these readings mean for you today. Was there a particular reading which appealed to you? Was there a word or image that engaged you?

Read the Word in Liturgy and Catholic Doctrine sections. These give you background on what you will be doing this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need for the session.

The Word in Liturgy

The description of God's choice of David over his brothers that is found in 1 Samuel is a tale of human blindness, our inability to see spiritual truth as God sees it. David is portrayed as the least likely of his brothers to be chosen for greatness—it never even occurs to his father to present David to Samuel as a candidate for divine election. But God sees into the heart and directs the prophet to anoint David, causing the spirit of the Lord to rush upon him. The gesture of anointing signifies both God's choice of David and his consecration for the mission entrusted to him, shepherding God's people as king. The blindness of those around David to his potential for being an instrument of God's power is a symbol on many levels of how sin can blind us to God's will for us and for the world.

The figure of a man blind from birth is a fitting image of the human condition known as original sin. Without personal fault or responsibility, the man is nonetheless truly “in the dark” of a sinful world. John tells the story of the man's cure by Jesus in a way that reveals who it is that is truly blind—those who stubbornly refuse to accept Jesus as the light of the world (John 8:12). Social sin is not the same as original sin, but flows from it, and is the cumulative result of human choices to turn away from the light. The dramatic unfolding of John's story gives eloquent expression to the way individuals in a community compound their blindness, to their own and others' detriment. Everyone gets involved—the man's neighbors, his family, those who had seen him begging, the Pharisees—and the evil grows until, in an act that is surely filled with Johannine irony, the man is expelled from the synagogue for acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah.

Catholic Doctrine

Original Sin and Social Sin

The inescapable fact that from the dawn of time men and women have sinned led St. Augustine to pose his famous question, “Whence evil?” and prompted this great writer to reflect upon the account of Adam and Eve’s fall from original holiness as portrayed by Genesis. By turning away from God and choosing to go against the divine prohibition they not only shattered the harmony of body and soul but experienced alienation from their creator and all creation. The Adam and Eve account in Genesis may very well be figurative, and yet the Second Vatican Council affirmed that “at the very start of history” humanity abused its freedom and sought to place itself on a par with God.

Indeed, it is precisely because we are offered salvation in Jesus that we are enabled to more clearly identify our original alienation from God. The very notion of a fallen state, a harmful captivity, a loss which is termed “original sin” is the opposite pole of the Good News of our release and liberation through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus (CCC 389).

Born into a state of alienation from God, we are offered a way out by the generous mercy of our Creator through the new birth of baptism. And yet, the primeval event of original sin permeates this world. Born again to the new life of grace, we nevertheless find ourselves on a battleground, struggling against the powers of evil, and must constantly strive to do what is right. Assisted by God’s grace, the human person can achieve an “inner integrity” (GS 37.2).

This inner integrity, however, does not spare the individual from committing sin from time to time. Why? The very inclination to sin, concupiscence, is a result due to the tragedy of original sin and is stirred up by communal situations, social structures, and institutions that are in conflict with divine graciousness (CCC 408).

Not only each individual, but the world itself—as a result of original sin, the personal sins we commit, and structures of social sin—is in need of Christ, our physician, for healing.