

**OPENING COLLECT**

Merciful Lord, absolve your people from their offences, that through your bountiful goodness we may all be delivered from the chains of those sins which by our frailty we have committed; grant this, heavenly Father, for Jesus Christ's sake, our blessed Lord and Saviour, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.  
**Amen.**

**FIRST READING: 1 Samuel 16.1-13**

<sup>1</sup> The LORD said to Samuel, 'How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons.' <sup>2</sup> Samuel said, 'How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me.' And the LORD said, 'Take a heifer with you, and say, "I have come to sacrifice to the LORD." <sup>3</sup> Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you.' <sup>4</sup> Samuel did what the LORD commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, 'Do you come peaceably?' <sup>5</sup> He said, 'Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice.' And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice. <sup>6</sup> When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, 'Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the LORD.' <sup>7</sup> But the LORD said to Samuel, 'Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.' <sup>8</sup> Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, 'Neither has the LORD chosen this one.' <sup>9</sup> Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, 'Neither has the LORD chosen this one.' <sup>10</sup> Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, 'The LORD has not chosen any of these.' <sup>11</sup> Samuel said to Jesse, 'Are all your sons here?' And he said, 'There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep.' And Samuel said to Jesse, 'Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here.' <sup>12</sup> He sent and brought David in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The LORD said, 'Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.' <sup>13</sup> Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

This week we read a third challenging passage from John's Gospel. So far, in Lent, we have been thinking about the decision to walk through life with God, and then the need to realise that we have to learn to live by trusting obedience, which may be challenging and unsettling if we think we know our way through life, or are challenged by events around us. Nicodemus is very unsure when faced with the challenge of Jesus! Then, last week, we saw that the God who calls us into that trusting relationship is a God who provides for his people, for Jesus is the bread of life and the living water. And, now, for today's Gospel, we have one of John's long discourses arising from the healing of a blind man, and posing the question, who can really **experience the Kingdom**? We might expect that what seems obvious to us will be obvious to others, but there is a contrast between the pious Jews (Pharisees) and the 'sinner', who was born blind, and who is now reborn: a contrast between blindness and sight, light and darkness. He can see that God is in Christ and that it is a new world, and so he **experiences the new life**. Others cannot see God at work in him; they cannot see the dawn of the Kingdom, perhaps because they would have to change their ways. As a background to this, we have Samuel anointing David to be King in succession to Saul, whom God has rejected (v.1), which marks a new start for the people of God. Notice, however, that Samuel has to see with God's eyes (v.7), if he is to make the right choice! How confident are you that God is at work in the world? How is your witness being shown and received? The life and witness of the Church, as it experiences the Kingdom, should be our Lenten concern.

## **SECOND READING: Ephesians 5.8-14**

8 Once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light – 9 for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.

10 Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; 13 but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, 14 for everything that becomes visible is light.

Therefore it says,

'Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.'

This passage, from Ephesians, speaks of the children of God as 'walking in the light'. It is quite Johanine! Sometimes this may mean speaking and behaving in a way that mystifies the world: they will find it hard to see God at work in us. But we have to 'rise from the dead and walk in the light' (vv.8 & 14), whatever the cost. Remember the inheritance is yours, but it is for sharing with all, whether they 'see' or not.

**Experiencing the Kingdom** is about every person seeing God at work in the world.

## **Gospel: John 9.1-41**

1 As Jesus walked along, he saw a man blind from birth.

2 His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' 3 Jesus

answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. 4 We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. 5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.'

6 When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, 7 saying to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. 8 The neighbours and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, 'Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?' 9 Some were saying, 'It is he.' Others were saying, 'No, but it is someone like him.' He kept saying, 'I am the man.'

10 But they kept asking him, 'Then how were your eyes opened?' 11 He answered, 'The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, "Go to Siloam and wash." Then I went and washed and received my sight.'

12 They said to him, 'Where is he?' He said, 'I do not know.' 13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. 14 Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. 15 Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, 'He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.'

16 Some of the Pharisees said, 'This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath.' But others said, 'How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?' And they were divided. 17 So they said again to the blind man, 'What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.' He said, 'He is a prophet.' 18 The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight 19 and asked them, 'Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?' 20 His parents answered, 'We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; 21 but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.'

22 His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. 23 Therefore his parents said, 'He is of age; ask him.' 24 So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, 'Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.' 25 He answered, 'I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.' 26 They said to him, 'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?' 27 He answered them, 'I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?' Then they reviled him, saying, 'You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. 29 We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.' 30 The man answered, 'Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. 31 We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. 32 Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. 33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.' 34 They answered him, 'You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?' And they drove him out. 35 Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' 36 He answered, 'And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.' 37 Jesus said to him, 'You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.' 38 He said, 'Lord, I believe.' And he worshipped him. 39 Jesus said, 'I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.' 40 Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, 'Surely we are not blind, are we?' 41 Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, "We see," your sin remains.'

**Post-Communion Collect:** Lord God, whose blessed Son our Saviour gave his back to the smiters and did not hide his face from shame: give us grace to endure the sufferings of this present time with sure confidence in the glory that shall be revealed; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**