

Meditations: Sunday of the Fourth Week of Lent (Year A)

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during this Lenten season.

- Going beyond appearances
- David's mission
- Jesus frees us from blindness

THE PROPHET SAMUEL is at Jesse's house. The Lord has told him that one of Jesse's sons is the future king of Israel. When Samuel sees the eldest son Eliab, he thinks at first that this is the chosen one. But God tells him: *Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his*

stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart (1 Sam 16:7). Jesse presents seven of his sons to the prophet, but none of them is chosen. It is only when David arrives, who was shepherding the flock, that the Lord says to Samuel: *Arise, anoint him, for this is he (1 Sam 16:12).*

God invites us to go beyond appearances; that is, to overcome the first impression that a person can make on us. At times, when we meet someone, we may quickly put up a wall because we think it is not going to be easy for us to like that person. This attitude, however, deprives us of enriching ourselves with that person's way of being. Surely neither his father nor his brothers imagined that David, the youngest, would be chosen for a central mission in the history of Israel. Looking at a

person's heart, as God does, helps us to discover their true value, much greater than what we might have thought.

“The understanding that is the fruit of charity, of love,” the Prelate of Opus Dei writes, “is ‘comprehensive’: it ‘sees,’ first of all, not the defects or faults, but the virtues and good qualities of others.”^[1] Affection makes it easier for us to focus on what is positive in others.

Nevertheless, it is not always easy to overcome appearances. Despite our effort to look at a person's heart, misunderstandings can arise. Then, without getting discouraged, we need to ask God for help, so that we can say with the psalmist: *You have expanded my heart (Ps 119:32)*.

BEFORE the Lord's election, David was a humble shepherd. In fact, when Samuel arrived he was out shepherding the flock (cf. *Sam* 16:11). After being anointed by the prophet, the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon him. From that moment on David would no longer be simply a shepherd of animals; he would be charged with watching over the people of Israel. His job up to then had been to ensure that the sheep didn't stray from the flock and were not attacked by wild beasts; now, instead, his primary concern will be that the Israelites remain on the right path and do not decide to follow false lights. He will be able to carry out this mission because God, the true shepherd, has chosen him. *He leads me in paths of righteousness, David will write, for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me (Ps 23:3-4).*

Despite being the shepherd of Israel, David himself will sometimes stray from the right path. This is an experience that, to a greater or lesser extent, we all have. Sometimes we can sense clearly the inconsistency between what we should be and what we are; between what we say and what we do. Nevertheless, in David's life we see a common thread: dialogue with God. At all times, both in victory and in defeat, he strives to turn to the Lord, for he knows that everything he has comes from Him. He is the shepherd of Israel not because he has earned this through his merits, but because God, looking into his heart, has chosen him. "The experience of sin should not make us doubt our mission," Saint Josemaría said. "The power of God is made manifest in our weakness, and it spurs us to fight, to battle against our defects, although we know that we will never achieve total victory during our pilgrimage on earth. The

Christian life is a continuous beginning again each day.”^[2]—

Even though we are weak, we can become for others a source of God’s unconditional love. For He makes us worthy of being loved despite our own sins, when we convert. God’s mercy is not expressed only as forgiveness in the face of human wretchedness; it is not an “exception” made for the one who has erred. Rather divine mercy expresses how far reaching God’s love is, how it is prior to the experience of sin. “You were not even born yet; before the world existed I already loved you.”^[3]— God’s mercy somehow defines us: it is at the origin of our being and of his providence throughout our whole life. This is the Love that chose David, and forgave him and confirmed him in his mission; the Love by which he is called to be Israel’s shepherd.

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FROM DAVID'S DESCENDANTS will come the Messiah, the shepherd who will not only guide the people of Israel, but who will rescue and redeem all humanity. He himself will be the light of the world, the one who will bring men and women out of darkness so that they seek what is pleasing to God (cf. *Eph* 5:8). Through sin "we become blind and we choose to remain in darkness; we go along that way, without seeing, like those who are blind, moving about as best we can. Let us allow God's love, who sent Jesus to save us, to enter our heart and help us to see things with the light of God, with the true light and not with the darkness that the Lord of darkness provides."^[4] Just as when a room is illuminated we can distinguish the objects in it, so with the Messiah's arrival the darkness disappears and we can undertake good works.

When Jesus restored sight to a man blind from birth, the miracle was actually much greater than the bodily healing. *“Do you believe in the Son of Man?”* Jesus asked. *“And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?”* Jesus said to him, *“You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.”* He said, *“Lord, I believe,”* and he worshiped him (Jn 9:35-38). Christ cured his blindness so that, on seeing Him, he would recognize Him as the Messiah. That man, in contemplating Jesus’ face, escaped not only from physical darkness but above all from spiritual darkness; through his faith he was able to welcome the light that Christ offered him. In contrast, the Pharisees, unable to admit their own blindness, closed themselves off from our Lord’s action. *Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin, but now that you say: ‘We see,’ your guilt remains”* (Jn 9:41). We can ask our Lady to help us recognize our

own mistakes and let Jesus illumine our soul with his light.

[¹] Fernando Ocariz, Pastoral Letter, 16 February 2023.

[²] Saint Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 114.

[³] Saint Alphonsus de Liguori, *The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*, 1, 1-5.

[⁴] Francis, Homily, 22 April 2020.

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(03/22/2026)