

4th Sunday of Lent

Scrutinies have prepared adults for baptism since the earliest centuries of Christianity. Some of the readings and prayers you hear at Mass during these middle weeks of Lent have accompanied the scrutinies at least since the eighth century. They are called “scrutinies” because of Psalm 139, which opens with the words, “O Lord, you search me and you know me. You yourself know my resting and my rising; you discern my thoughts from afar.” In these rites, those preparing for baptism lay their inmost thoughts bare to the Lord, who helps them turn away from whatever keeps them from goodness and strengthens what draws them toward it. The prayers I say are actually called exorcisms because they drive out the power of evil and instill the spirit of good. Three classic gospels illustrate this conversion: the woman at the well, the man born blind and the raising of Lazarus.

To prepare us for the account of the man born blind, the lectionary offers a passage from Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians that applies darkness and light to faith. Jesus cured several blind people to show movement from the darkness of unbelief to the light of belief in Christ. In today’s miracle faith came after sight. But some people who witnessed the same miracle did not come to belief.

Cameras capture the light of truth. One study shows that an American thinks he or she is on camera about five times a day, but it’s more like 34 times a day. Cameras provide security, but they also expose our lives more than we may like. They don’t always settle issues. Indeed, like those who witnessed the miracle in today’s gospel, several people can look at the same video and come to different conclusions.

Privacy is at risk. We share much about ourselves every time we like something on social media or use a credit card. Some people get nervous about this, and maybe they should. But St. Paul, without foreseeing any of these technological developments, said something wise to Christians: “You are light in the Lord. Live as children of light, for light produces every kind of goodness and righteousness and truth.... Take no part in the fruitless works of darkness...; it is shameful even to mention the things done by them in secret.” Then he quotes what was probably an early hymn to those awaiting baptism: “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.”

We have little control over cameras that expose what we do. But we do have control over what we do. If we do things we hope no one sees, those things are, to use Paul’s expression, “the fruitless works of darkness.” We are Christians. We are better than those fruitless works. Rather, we are to live in way that invites cameras. We perform “every kind of goodness and righteousness and truth,” and we want the world to see it, know it, learn from it, and imitate it.

In the gospel heard at other Masses this weekend, Jesus says, “Everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come toward the light, so that his works might not be exposed. But whoever lives the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God.” He could say this about cameras: The wicked hate them but those who live the truth come to them.

Something may open our eyes this Lent: these elect preparing for baptism, our works of penance, or some camera. Whatever it is, let us walk in the light.