



# Triumph

LENTEN PROGRAM 2023

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JOEL 2:12–18

PSALM 50(51):3–6, 12–14, 17

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MATTHEW 6:1–6, 16–18

**When you give alms....**

**When you pray.... When you fast.** MT 6:2, 5, 16

We are given three instruments to help us overcome sin and temptation during this season of Lent so that we might journey ever closer to God.

The first is *almsgiving*. In helping those in need, in being merciful to others, we open ourselves up to receiving the mercy of God (Mt 5:7). But in giving to the poor, we also imitate God. God is the greatest almsgiver, in that God gives to all. By giving to others, we imitate God. When we imitate someone, we become more like that person. When we imitate God, we become more like God.

The second is *prayer*. In prayer, we move closer to God. When two friends or a couple spend time together, speaking and listening to one another, inevitably they will move closer together in heart and mind. Likewise, in spending time with God in prayer—speaking and listening to God—we will inevitably move closer to God.

The third is *fasting*. Fasting is connected to almsgiving in that the money we save through fasting, cutting back on certain foods and other luxuries, might be given to the poor. But fasting also helps us overcome temptation. Often during the season of Lent, people give up something: chocolate or snacks between meals, for example. The reason is not to go on a diet, it is not to lose weight. It is to imitate Christ who fasted and abstained from food during his 40 days in the wilderness so that he was able to overcome greater temptations. Fasting helps to overcome temptation because it develops a sense of discipline within us. If we can resist small temptations, like chocolate or snacks between meals, then hopefully, when far greater temptations come our way, we will also be able to say no to such temptations.

*Lord, during this season of Lent,  
may I move ever closer to you. Amen.*

FR ANTONY JUKES OFM

Thursday after Ash Wednesday

## THURSDAY 23 FEBRUARY 2023

DEUTERONOMY 30:15–20

PSALM 1:1–4, 6

LUKE 9:22–25

**“What gain, then, is it for a man to have won the whole world and to have lost or ruined his very self?”** LK 9:25

Today’s reading, psalm and Gospel are a trilogy proclaiming the truth that Jesus is life! To choose the way of Jesus, that is, the way of selflessness and love, is to choose happiness and life—both in the here and in eternal life.

In my own journey there have been “big” moments of choosing life and saying “no” to selfishness (or things of the world.) When I was 21, I had a life-changing experience at a World Youth Day where I chose to end a relationship, begin studying theology, and join a Catholic young adult community—all major decisions that reflected my desire to choose new life in Christ. Now, many years later, I find myself still faced with choosing the way of Jesus or the way of the world, albeit in smaller or more everyday circumstances.

Last year, my Lenten resolutions included an extra daily act of love. Often it was something small like an additional chore or a minute of service for someone in need. What amazed me was how happy these little chosen tasks made me feel and the life that arose from choosing to focus on another instead of myself. For you, the invitation might be slightly different as many of us find we’re so busy serving others that we “lose ourselves” and the call Jesus places on our lives for relationship with him in the midst of our busyness.

Today is a great day to think about where Jesus’ invitation to choose life is in your own circumstances, and to respond immediately.

*Lord Jesus, you gave your life to save mine. Help me to know your will in my life, to choose the way of love in every moment, and to know you are ever by my side helping me towards what is good. Amen.*

BERNADETTE TOOHEY MGL



4<sup>th</sup>  
SUNDAY  
OF  
LENT





THE  
*Blind Man*





### *The Blind Man at the Pool of Siloam*

**Edmund Blair Leighton (1852–1922).**

**“The Blind Man at the Pool of Siloam”, c. 1879.**

Oil on Canvas, 101.6cm x 127.6cm

Brigham Young University Museum of Art. Public Domain.

Now, in the second part of Lent, the Church presents us with the greatest of Christ’s miracles—today the cure of the blind man, and next Sunday the raising of Lazarus—remembering that these are the original readings for the final instruction of catechumens entering the Faith at Easter. Listening to them carefully should still fill us with awe.

Edmund Blair Leighton was an English artist, born in 1852. He was one of the Romantics of the late Victorian era who found great success with classical and medieval subjects popular at the time. *The Blind Man at the Pool of Siloam*, painted around 1879, is one of his early works.

He had begun his career with monochrome illustrations for Cassell’s Magazine and its Book of British Ballads, but soon gave up black and white, working for the rest of his life in oil on canvas. He exhibited at the Royal Academy for 40 years.

St John has attached great symbolism to this account of Jesus’ cure of the blind man. The passage begins: “As he went along, he [Jesus] saw a man who had been blind from birth” (Jn 9:1). Jesus saw him, but he obviously did not see Jesus. It is Jesus who takes the initiative to enter into the life of someone who could not take the initiative himself. Jesus would later say to his disciples at the last supper: “You did not choose me, no, I chose you” (Jn 15:16). What is more, the man born blind knows that he cannot take the initiative. He is the epitome of those who know they can do nothing without the help of others—those who know they need God. The man’s humility sounds more loudly in Jesus’ ears than the clamour of the crowd

around him. Human need always touches the heart of God. St Luke tells us of Jesus' compassion for the widow of Nain (Lk 7:11–17)—the Greek literally says, “He was moved to the bowels”—and next Sunday, we will see him breaking down at the tomb of his friend. In all of the Gospels, Jesus seems to be drawn to people's suffering like iron to magnet.

Again, Luke makes this obvious in his parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk 15:11–32). The father was “moved with pity” at his son's return, even though the boy had humiliated him publicly. And when Jesus answers Peter's question, “Lord, how many times must I forgive my brother if he wrongs me?” with “seventy-seven times,” (Mt 18:21)—i.e., infinity—Jesus is only telling Peter to do what God does. It is not only the physically sick who arouse God's pity, but those suffering from the sickness of sin.

Leighton has captured not the moment of the healing, but the blind man's act of obedience to Christ who had told him to “go and wash in the Pool of Siloam.” With cane in right hand, he has his left arm around the shoulders of a young girl who has come to help him. Notice that Jesus does not give an initial promise of a cure, simply the command to go and wash. The blind man accepts this without a word of protest, a sign of his great humility, for he could have been asking himself what good would that do. He had not protested either when Jesus made the seemingly humiliating gesture of rubbing his spittle mired with clay on the man's eyes. How would you react if someone you'd never met before came up and covered your face with their saliva?

This is so similar to the story we hear on Monday of Lent's third week of Naaman the leper who was told by the prophet Elisha to wash seven times in the Jordan River. But, unlike the blind man, Naaman felt insulted by being asked to do such a simple thing. “Here was I, thinking he would be sure to come out to me, and stand there, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over [me]” (2 Kg 5:11).

Finally, he thought better and did as he was told. But the point is that God works in our

lives through the most simple of things—no thunder and lightning, but things as familiar and ordinary as water and oil, bread and wine. Lent is the time to re-invigorate our faith. The clay Jesus used to anoint the blind man's eyes is, of course, a reminder of our nature as creatures. “God shaped man from the soil of the ground” (Gn 2:7). Now, Christ had come to re-create.

Most of the passage is not a conversation between Jesus and the man born blind. Jesus appears only at the beginning and the end (notice Leighton does not include the figure of Jesus in his painting.) Rather, John is concentrating on the record of

**Notice that Jesus does not give an initial promise of a cure, simply the command to go and wash. The blind man accepts this without a word of protest, a sign of his great humility, for he could have been asking himself what good would that do.**

the words of those who refuse to believe the testimony of the cured man (and thus the testimony of Jesus himself.) To call their words a conversation would be an insult, because they really have no interest in listening to the man or even addressing him. The blind Pharisees are really only talking to themselves. They have their preconceived ideas about God, and nothing is going to sway them.

This leads us to ask ourselves: are we entirely open to God? Do we allow him to break into our lives the way *he* chooses?

Do we expect theophanies, or have we trained ourselves to see him in the ordinary rather than the extra-ordinary? It reminds me of the words of the poet Elizabeth Barret Browning: “Earth is crammed with heaven”. We have only to look.

But one great preconception St John addresses is our nagging fear that sickness and misfortune are punishments from God. The disciples themselves are operating on this premise. How could someone sin who was not yet born? So, the blame is thrown onto the parents of the blind man. Jesus emphatically declares the man free from sin and affirms that God sometimes allows a physical evil to afflict good people (such as Job in the Old Testament) to manifest a greater good. This particular man was born in darkness so that the light of God might shine on the world. St Paul would later write that he gloried in his weaknesses. They made God's power more obvious.

MGR GRAHAM SCHMITZER

1 SAMUEL 16:1, 6–7, 10–13

PSALM 22(23)

EPHESIANS 5:8–14

JOHN 9:1, 6–9, 13–17, 34–38

## OPENING PRAYER

Host: Let us pause and call to mind  
God's presence within and among us,  
today and always.

*Brief pause.*

**All:** Good and loving God,  
source of every grace and blessing,  
as we gather for our Lenten  
group discussions,  
we place ourselves before you,  
for you are filled with beauty and light  
and you care deeply for each one of us.

Help us to listen before speaking.

Help us to respect and understand  
the opinions of others.

Help us to trust one another and share  
with openness and vulnerability.

May your light enfold us.

May your Spirit guide us.

May your grace abound in us.

We make this prayer through  
Christ our Lord. Amen.

## RESPONSORIAL PSALM



PSALM 22(23)

**R. The Lord is my shepherd;  
there is nothing I shall want.**

The Lord is my shepherd;  
there is nothing I shall want.

Fresh and green are the pastures  
where he gives me repose.

Near restful waters he leads me,  
he revives my soul.

He guides me along the right path,  
for the sake of his name. **R.**

Though I should walk in the valley  
of the shadow of death,  
no evil would I fear, for you are with me.

Your crook and your staff will give me comfort. **R.**

You have prepared a table before for me  
in the sight of my foes.

My head you have anointed with oil;  
my cup is overflowing, overflowing. **R.**

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  
all the days of my life.

In the Lord's own house shall I dwell  
for length of days unending, days unending. **R.**



## GOSPEL



JOHN 9:1, 6–9, 13–17, 34–38

As Jesus went along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. He spat on the ground, made a paste with the spittle, put this over the eyes of the blind man, and said to him, “Go and wash in the Pool of Siloam” (a name that means “sent”). So the blind man went off and washed himself, and came away with his sight restored.

His neighbours and people who earlier had seen him begging said, “Isn’t this the man who used to sit and beg?” Some said, “Yes, it is the same one.” Others said, “No, he only looks like him.” The man himself said, “I am the man.”

They brought the man who had been blind to the Pharisees. It had been a sabbath day when Jesus made the paste and opened the man’s eyes, so when the Pharisees asked him how he had come to see, he said, “He put a paste on my eyes, and I washed, and I can see.” Then some of the Pharisees said, “This man cannot be from God: he does not keep the sabbath.” Others said, “How could a sinner produce signs like this?” And there was disagreement among them. So they spoke to the blind man again, “What have you to say about him yourself, now that he has opened your eyes?” “He is a prophet” replied the man.

“Are you trying to teach us,” they replied “and you a sinner through and through, since you were born!” And they drove him away.

Jesus heard they had driven him away, and when he found him he said to him, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” “Sir,” the man replied “tell me who he is so that I may believe in him.” Jesus said, “You are looking at him; he is speaking to you.” The man said, “Lord, I believe,” and worshipped him.

The Gospel of the Lord.

**All: Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.**

*Pause for silent reflection.*

## True spiritual sight

Today, St John takes us on a journey into what true spiritual sight consists of. As so often happens with the Gospel writers, the lesson that comes out is not what we might have expected. This event took place outside the Temple from where Jesus had just departed. The Pool of Siloam was nearby.

It was customary around the time of Jesus to associate those with a disability, whether from birth or during one's life, as somehow being the result of sin. The Law taught that people should be kind to the lame, the blind and the poor, but this was not always the case. However, Jesus sets the record straight about disability and its origin, thus setting the stage for what was about to unfold. Moreover, the man remains anonymous throughout the episode—perhaps because he is symbolic of all those who come to spiritual sight in Jesus.

The making of a poultice with spittle was seen in some gentile areas as a form of medical treatment, but for the majority in Jewish culture, it would have been vulgar and therefore the man would have felt uncomfortable to undergo the treatment. According to the prevailing interpretation of the Law, the making of a mud poultice on the Sabbath would have been viewed as work, and thus breaking the Sabbath rest. Whereas, sending someone to wash had clear spiritual allusion to Naaman (2 Kg 5:1–27) or perhaps to the washing of purification common amongst the Jews.

The interrogation begins when his neighbours, and some previous onlookers from his begging days, disagree on whether it was the actual man born blind or just someone who looks like him. The man himself settles the dispute.

The key word over the next 22 verses (vv. 13–34) is “knowledge”, because those who are supposedly

knowledgeable of the Law (the Pharisees) are shown to be ignorant, and the one who is supposedly ignorant of the Law (the man formerly blind) is shown to be knowledgeable. The word is used 10 times! Not surprisingly, however, the people are more interested in how it happened rather than in the fact that it happened, and so give praise to God.

The Pharisees on the other hand are the supposed bearers of knowledge, so the man is brought to them to verify the wondrous act that

had taken place. Yet, even after seeing for themselves, they do not wish to accept the reality because they do not wish to believe. So, they send for the man's parents to testify and ask them the same question. Once again, however, the supposed bearers of knowledge are still ignorant, because they do not wish to believe. Belief is ultimately a decision!

They treat the man harshly and unjustly even though the Pharisees had a scrupulous set of rules for questioning and cross examining a witness when establishing the

truth in a dispute. The treatment of the man violates pharisaic ethical teaching when their prejudice about his “sinful” state (as a man born blind) comes to the fore and he is eventually expelled from the Temple (and presumably from the religious community.)

St John shows that faith in Jesus is the key to true knowledge of the Law. It is a decision. This is demonstrated by the man's fullness of faith which leads him to an act of worship; something reserved to God alone. By contrast, the prejudice, insincerity, and refusal to believe demonstrated by the Pharisees result in an ever-deepening blindness which elicits a final judgment from Jesus that “their guilt remains” (Jn 9:41). True spiritual sight consists of faith in Jesus.

FR MARK DE BATTISTA



*To see or not to see*

**H**ave you ever noticed the billboards that one finds along the motorway or in airports? They feature a huge empty white advertising space and carry the caption, “Unsee this.” I wonder, for a few minutes anyway, what I might put there if I had a chance. The sign hits on a great human truth, we cannot unsee what we have seen. Whatever we see has its influence until the day we die. That of course is one of the tragedies of trauma—no matter what people do, they cannot unsee the horror they have witnessed.

I remember talking to an old woman once, a Polish immigrant, let’s call her “Anna”. She had been a young domestic worker in a hotel for officers during the Second World War. Anna was old when I knew her and could no longer physically or emotionally keep the horrors hidden. I spent hours in her company over a cup of tea as she lived them again in the telling. Anna had seen hundreds of people shot and pushed into mass graves, she had seen torture, and she had seen unthinkable hunger and deprivation. She could even remember names.

Around the corner from her lived another Polish immigrant, Katarina, who had likewise

**Somehow across the years because of her deep faith and love of God, she had managed to see those events differently. In life, it is not *what* we see that has its lasting effects, it is *how* we see it.**

seen comparable horrors, perhaps even worse. She had lost an infant son to unspeakable cruelty. Katarina, however, though elderly, was full of life. Somehow across the years because of her deep faith and love of God,

she had managed to see those events differently. In life, it is not *what* we see that has its lasting effects, it is *how* we see it.

It seems to me that this Gospel today has a great deal to say about “seeing” and “unseeing”. Jesus “saw” the man who was blind. The Pharisees wanted him to “unsee” his perception and

experience of Jesus, and they wanted his parents to “unsee” their son. The locals were not sure whom they had “seen”. The man in question was certain about who and what he had seen. He had seen mercy, he had seen compassion, he had seen recognition, he had been vindicated for all the years he had been wrongly accused of being a sinner. He had seen love, and he could not unsee it. It was to shape his life forever.

And what about you? Have there been times when you, too, have “seen” and your life has been changed? I imagine the first sight of your baby son or daughter changed you. Have there been times when you, too, have tried to “unsee” and it has just not worked? How have you come to see it now?

There is an old African way of greeting which says, “I see you.” In this Gospel, Jesus could have said the same thing to the man born blind: “I see you, even though you cannot see me.” The encounter that followed—when Jesus came looking for him and found him—ensured that he did truly *see* Jesus. Maybe you can remember a time when life was against you and someone rang you up, or called in, or sent an email or text, and you found that you were not alone. That was Jesus *seeing* you too.

Perhaps this week you might just be aware of what you see and cannot unsee. God is hidden behind the vision. There is just a chance you will also see your *triumph* when it comes.

MOTHER HILDA SCOTT OSB

**Maybe you can remember a time when life was against you and someone rang you up, or called in, or sent an email or text, and you found that you were not alone. That was Jesus *seeing* you too.**

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

### GOSPEL REFLECTION

*True spiritual sight*

- What does it mean to you to “know God”?
- The man’s fullness of faith leads him to an act of worship. How does your faith lead you to action?

### SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

*To see or not to see*

- Do you feel “seen” by God or others? How does being “seen” make you feel?
- Who are the people in your life that you know need you to “see” them. How might you make an effort to that this week?

### PERSONAL REFLECTION FOR THE WEEK AHEAD

Fr Mark reminds us that belief is ultimately a decision. This week, take time to reflect on important decisions that you are making at the moment. Pray for God’s guidance in those decisions and make space to listen for what he might be saying to you. Continue to increase your daily time of silence and prayer by a few minutes each day.

### CLOSING PRAYER AND INTERCESSIONS

Host: Eternal Father,  
your Son has promised that you would grant all the graces we ask of you in his name. Trusting in this promise, and in the name of Jesus Christ, we ask of you the following graces:

We ask for *wisdom* to know ourselves more deeply, follow you more closely and love you more truly.

**All: Lord, grace us with your wisdom.**

Host: We ask for your divine *light*, which will enable us to see the vanity of all the things of this earth, and see also your infinite greatness and goodness.

**All: Lord, grace us with your light.**

Host: We ask for a share in your *love*, so that we can detach ourselves from all creatures, especially ourselves, and love only your holy will.

**All: Lord, grace us with your love.**

Host: Grant us the grace to have *confidence in the merits* of Jesus Christ and in the intercession of his most holy mother, Mary.

**All: Lord, grace us with confidence in your merits.**

Host: We ask for the grace of *perseverance*, knowing that whenever we call on you for assistance, you will answer our calls and come to our aid.

**All: Lord, grace us with perseverance.**

Host: Finally, grant us the grace to pray always, O Eternal Father, in the name of Jesus.

**All: Amen.**

*Adapted from the “Prayer for Fives Graces”  
by St Alphonsus Liguori (1696–1787).*



2 SAMUEL 7:4–5, 12–14, 16  
PSALM 88(89):2–5, 27, 29  
ROMANS 4:13:16–18, 22  
MATTHEW 1:16, 18–21, 24

**He did what the angel of the Lord  
had told him to do.** MT 1:24

Joseph, a humble, hard-working carpenter, lived in simplicity and obscurity. Through no merit of his own, he has been promised a beautiful young woman—Our Lady. Little did he know that, through Mary, God would dramatically transform his life. He is invited to raise a divine Child, with many unforeseeable consequences: arranging for the baby’s birth in terrible circumstances, fleeing from a murderous local king, living as a refugee, moving home again, and so on.

At a natural level, God’s request was very strange and his plan demanding—calling for heroism. Yet in the moment of the angelic invitation, Joseph is silent. He remains silent in all that follows.

Like many of the best of men, he sees no need to speak. This life, this mission, is a gift from God. In obedience, and without fuss, “He did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do.” From this startling, but hidden, beginning unfolds the greatest adventure of human history: the advent of Jesus, “The one who is to save his people from their sins” (Matt 1:21).

By doing what the Lord asks, despite the heartache and difficulties, Joseph cooperates in God’s saving plan for the world. Remarkable!

While our lives may be even more hidden than Joseph’s, God also asks us to live with great courage and love. May we, like Joseph, in humble, no-fuss obedience, do what the Lord asks, trusting that in our own small way we are also cooperating with Jesus’ saving work.

*Jesus, in calm silence, help me obey your plans for me and for the whole world. Amen.*

SR ANASTASIA REEVES OP

EZEKIEL 47:1–9, 12  
PSALM 45(46):2–3, 5–6, 8–9, R. V.8  
JOHN 5:1–3, 5–16

**“For wherever the water goes it brings health,  
and life teems wherever the river flows.”** EZ 47:9

The flowing water that the prophet Ezekiel was shown by the angel is understood to refer to the waters of Baptism. The river that is formed from the water becomes lined with trees, symbolising the growth of virtue in the believer. These virtues, like trees on a riverbed, provide strength and stability.

This imagery we have in Ezekiel is echoed in a very similar vision given to St John by an angel (Rv 22:1–5). In St John’s vision, the trees produce fruit each month, and the leaves of the trees are for the healing of the nations. Likewise, in Ezekiel’s vision, the river ends up flowing into the ocean, purifying it, and causing the flourishing of many fish, which we can take to mean new believers.

When we imagine a river, most often it is an image of relaxation and calm, but at full flow, rivers are powerful, untameable, and awe-inspiring. In time, the waters of a river can shape and smooth jagged rocks and carve a new path through even the driest land. A river will run until there is nowhere left to run, collecting into lakes and oceans.

Where does your life lead you? And what do you leave in your wake? Is your life leading outwards to others? Is your life lined by your growth in virtue? Does life teem wherever you go?

*Lord Jesus, help me to pour my life out in love and service of others. May it flow from the Temple—my relationship with you—out into the world and bear much fruit. Amen.*

PETER GILMORE