

*Lent 2023, Week 4 Reflection*

## UPENDING EXPECTATIONS, LOOKING INTO THE HEART

*Welcome to the Fourth Week of the Lenten audio retreat, presented by Ignatian Young Adult Ministries, an initiative of the Office of Ignatian Spirituality. We invite you to intentionally pause the busyness of ordinary life: get still, breathe deeply, and listen closely as we explore this week's theme: "Upending Expectations, Looking into the Heart." This reflection was written by James Luisi, a member of the 2021-2023 Virtual Cohort of Contemplative Leaders in Action...*

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"How is your Lent going so far?"

This is a question that is easy to ask myself at this stage of the Lenten journey. In years past I have by now likely already put forth an effort to succeed at at least one or two Lenten practices, either through addition or subtraction, usually to mixed results. Whether my desire was to pray more regularly, abstain from meat, or go to Mass more often during the week, I have undoubtedly woken up too late to pray before going to work, absentmindedly eaten a slice of pepperoni pizza, or arrived at the end of a long week only to realize I didn't participate in a single additional celebration of the Eucharist.



["Trabzon Sophia Healing of the blind man 4815"](#)  
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"How is my Lent going so far?" I've most assuredly failed to live up to my own expectations for how I would create space for the Lord to show up in my life.

That is why this Sunday's readings give me so much hope.

A theme throughout this Fourth Sunday of Lent's readings is how God is always ready to subvert our own limited expectations. Samuel, tasked with finding the Lord's anointed among the house of Jesse, goes to size up Jesse's sons to see who among them might be fit to serve as king of Israel. After seeing Eliab and all of Jesse's other sons, Samuel is perplexed. Although Eliab and the others seem like excellent candidates to serve as king, Samuel does not sense the Lord's favor upon any of them. It is only when he asks Jesse "Are these all the sons you have?" that David is presented, the smallest and youngest of the bunch, but the one whom the Lord has chosen. Samuel's persistence in seeking out the Lord's will, even as the options before him dwindle, is rewarded. God is faithful to Samuel and the people of Israel, even though

not in the way any of us might have expected. We are reminded of the truth of the narrowness of our own vision and pursuits, for “not as [human beings] see does God see, because [human beings see] the appearance, but the Lord looks into the heart.”

As we turn to the Gospel reading, we continue to see God’s invitation to expand our vision in order to embrace new possibilities. Jesus heals a man who was born blind (and Jesus performs this healing miracle on the sabbath, no less). Jesus intervenes in this man’s life to restore his sight, and the Pharisees take it as yet another opportunity to attempt to entrap Jesus. It might be easy to view the Pharisees as the “bad guys” of the Gospels, but what happens if we view their intentions in the best possible light? Jesus has violated the religious customs of their day by healing on the sabbath. Their notion of what God desires from them is incompatible with what God is actually doing. For us, there is no question that the Pharisees are, at best, mistaken in thinking they must condemn Jesus for what he has done. But are we really all that different when we focus our Lenten vision too narrowly on what we have or have not done, instead of on what God is already doing?

Perhaps we are also mistaken if we have become too lost in our attempts (or failures) to live out our Lenten devotions. Our observance of Lent and all of our best efforts to commit to prayer, fasting, and almsgiving are not in and of themselves holy. They are made holy only insofar as they open us up to a closer encounter with the God who loves us so deeply and dearly that, as Jesus, he would endure the physical, mental, and spiritual anguish of the cross.

So, as we continue to journey through Lent, assessing along the way how things are going, let us never lose sight of how Jesus is always already journeying with us, showing us new ways to live for the greater glory of God. Then, we just might find ourselves at the end of our Lenten journey sharing in the illumination of the Risen Christ, our light.

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*Thank you for joining us for this week’s reflection on “Upending Expectations” and “Looking into the Heart.” This Lenten retreat is presented by Ignatian Young Adult Ministries, an initiative of the Office of Ignatian Spirituality. Join us next week as we consider “Paradox and the Way of Life”...*

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### **Reflection questions:**

- How is my Lent going so far? Can I honestly evaluate my Lenten practices in the light of God’s mercy, judging how they have helped to develop (or hindered) my relationship with God?
  - As I continue to reflect on my Lenten journey, how has God surprised me? What can I learn from these surprises as I continue my journey to Good Friday and Easter?
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## Opening & Closing Prayers

### **Teach Me to Listen, adapted by John Veltri, SJ**

Teach me to listen, O God,  
to those nearest me,  
my family, my friends, my co-workers.  
Help me to be aware that  
no matter what words I hear,  
the message is,  
“Accept the person I am. Listen to me.”

Teach me to listen, my caring God,  
to those far from me—  
the whisper of the hopeless,  
the plea of the forgotten,  
the cry of the anguished.

Teach me to listen, O God my Mother,  
to myself.  
Help me to be less afraid  
to trust the voice inside —  
in the deepest part of me.

Teach me to listen, Holy Spirit,  
for your voice —  
in busyness and in boredom,  
in certainty and doubt,  
in noise and in silence.  
Teach me, Lord, to listen.  
Amen.

### **You Have Called Me by Name, by Joe Tetlow, SJ**

Oh, Lord my God,  
You called me from the sleep of nothingness  
merely because in your tremendous love  
you want to make good and beautiful beings.  
You have called me by my name in my mother’s womb.  
You have given me breath and light and movement  
and walked with me every moment of my existence.  
I am amazed, Lord God of the universe,  
that you attend to me and, more, cherish me.  
Create in me the faithfulness that moves you,  
and I will trust you and yearn for you all my days. Amen.