3-22-20/1 Sam. 16:1, 6-7, 10-13/Ps. 23/Eph. 5:8-14/Jn. 9:1-41

 I wish I could say that it is good to see you, but I cannot see you. I hope you can see me. I knew things were getting serious last week when we cancelled school and cancelled coffee and rolls and even cancelled fish fries. Now, public Mass has been cancelled because of the coronavirus pandemic. We are live streaming this Mass so that you can have the opportunity to be with your parish priests and your parish church. Although it is best to stay home as much as possible and there are no public Masses being celebrated with our congregation present, we still have perpetual adoration going on in the main church 24 hours a day, seven days a week, at least so far. Even the Cathedral in Lincoln had to shut their program down, but the people of our little parish have been doing a marvelous job. If any of you wants to spend “one-on-one” time with the Lord, He is here for you. The Blessed Sacrament on the altar here is a sign that Jesus is present. He said “I will not leave you orphans” and “I will be with you all days, even until the end of the world.” If you want to substitute or take a regular hour, we would love to have you sign up.

 The lesson this Sunday is that “Jesus is the light of the world.” Last week He told the Samaritan woman that He, Jesus, was the living water. Next week, when He raises His friend Lazarus from the dead, He says that He, Jesus, is the resurrection and the life. These are the lessons that adults preparing to become baptized members of the Church are taught about and were, at one time, “tested” about in what are called the scrutinies. We do not have any adults this year preparing for baptism in our parish, but please pray for the other people, already baptized, that are still preparing for the day to join us, a day that has not been formally set. We will find a day eventually. It looks as if we will not be together here physically at Holy Week and Easter this year, but we certainly hope to be with you in this way at least on Sundays for the next few weeks or so. Our previous pastor, Fr. Grell, was pretty good with this technology stuff. I am, well, learning. Keep in touch with our parish Facebook page and our parish website. We are in need of volunteers to help call our friends who do not have emails or use the internet at home. Let the office know if you can be a part of that. I just heard one of the public health doctors talking about being physically distant from each other, but not really “socially distant.” In fact, I have been talking to a lot of people on the telephone that I have not talked to for a long time. We might be learning to connect in ways that we were not before.

Jesus is truly the light of the world and “even though I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil; for You are at my side with Your rod and Your staff that give me courage.” We do not know what the coming days will bring, but we know that the light continues to increase as we head into spring, as we move toward Easter. “Quarantine” is a term we hear a lot about nowadays. It used to refer to the forty days that people thought was necessary to contain a disease. That is where the word comes from—forty. The Israelites wandered in the desert for forty years, and Jesus began His public life with a forty-day fast. That is what we are doing now—wandering in a kind of wilderness and fasting, trying to root out something worse than disease---sin. It is the “quarantine”; it is Lent. Fr. Gross and I are wearing the rose-colored vestments that are traditional for the Fourth Sunday of Lent. It is a joyful color in the midst of a solemn season. One source says that today was the last day before an older, much shorter time of preparation for Easter, the last outburst of joy before the long slog ahead, much like Mardi Gras, the day before Ash Wednesday, is now. I like the explanation we often use to explain it to people today—it means that we are more than halfway there to our destination. You know as well as I do that there was a lot of fear among people the last few weeks. We do not like the feeling of not being in control. We do not like uncertainty. And, it is still there. I like to think, though, that we have already taken the biggest steps and made the biggest sacrifices, and that we are more than halfway there. All of this is going to pay off, not only on beating the virus, but in renewing our family life, in renewing our faith, and in bringing us together. Because no matter how far apart we have to stand physically, we will always be together. Not just here, but for all eternity as well. That is our hope. That is our joy. That is the light that shines in the dark valley. Jesus says: “I am the light of the world.” Amen.