Currently, the Church is celebrating Year A in the three-year liturgical cycle of Sunday readings. In year A we read from St. Matthew's gospel. This Sunday and last Sunday, however, we read from John’s gospel. Why? Because Lent has special readings apart from the Ordinary Time of the year. During Lent every year, the first two Sundays present the Temptation of Jesus by the Devil, and Jesus’ Transfiguration. The next three Sundays of Lent are always the Samaritan woman at the well, today’s periscope of the man born blind but healed by Jesus, and next week’s raising Lazarus from the dead. The Passion is always read on Palm/Passion Sunday, and that narrative comes from that particular year’s Synoptic author. On Good Friday this year, we will read Matthew’s account. John’s gospel is not included in the three-year gospel cycle because each year, we read John’s gospel throughout the 50-day Easter Season, and on Sunday solemn feasts.

Why does Lent have special readings? Because like Advent and the Christmas season, Lent and the Easter season have special themes, particular to each season. Transcending from speaking about Advent, the themes of Lent for the Church are entering into Jesus’ Paschal Mystery and Baptism. During these forty days of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, the Church urges us to focus on Jesus’ vocation to do the will of the Father: Jesus’ confronting and conquering the Devil, Jesus’ revelation as second person of the Trinity, Jesus’ self-revelation as the Messiah, Jesus’ self-revelation as Son of man in his healing of the man-born-blind. Next week, we will see that Jesus’ raising Lazarus from the dead in anticipation of Jesus’ own resurrection from the dead. And on Palm/Passion Sunday, we will see the fickle crowd initially praising Jesus with “Hosanna in the highest,” and within a few days, turning against Jesus and calling out, “Crucify him.” The theme of Baptism originated in the Early Church when Catholics celebrated the Easter Vigil as occasion to welcome new members into the Church. At the Vigil, the Church offers to catechumens not just baptism but all the sacraments of initiation: baptism, confirmation, and Holy Communion. And at the Vigil, the universal Church one billion members are invited and expected to renew their baptismal promises.

So we want to appreciate today’s readings in the context of the season of Lent. We review and renew our desires and efforts to enter into Jesus’ Paschal Mystery. ... How is each of us doing in his/her promised practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving? ... If you are doing well, give thanks to God for his graces and your cooperation with his graces. If you are doing only so-so, then today is the half-way point in Lent to Easter.

So far, I have been speaking about the context of today’s readings. May I share just one word about today’s theme, i.e., “Not as man sees, does God see, because man sees the appearance but the Lord looks into the heart.” (1 Sam. 1610) Isn’t that a wonderful statement? ... Doesn’t that give hope to all of us? ... We all want to be seen for who we are, and not as others judge us. Each of us is God’s child.
He has “written our name in the palm of his hand.” (Is. 49.16) He knew us “in your mother’s womb before you were born.” (Jer. 1.5)

When God looks into your individual heart, he sees what others don’t see, yes? ... Your individual profound goodness, probably some profound hurts over the years, significant sacrifices, great fidelity, great intentions, yes. Most people will never know those things about us, right? ... I ask you ponder a related thought. ... God sees also into your neighbor’s heart. God sees in him/her what you do not see. Can you think of someone with whom you have difficulty relating? ... What does God see in that person’s heart? ... Wouldn’t it be wonderful if you could see what God sees? Choose one person who for you is a difficult person. Picture his/her heart. Try to see what God sees ... with his penetrating vision, his loving, understanding, forgiving vision. ... In this Lent 2014, wouldn’t it be wonderful to grow in God’s penetrating vision, to see what God sees, and practically speaking to see others as they are, as God sees them.

Three weeks lay behind us, in Lent 2014. Three weeks lay ahead of us. The first three are history; the next three are possibility. Let’s rededicate ourselves, individually and communally, as members of this community as we prepare for the celebration of Easter on April 20.