

**IN YOUR LIGHT WE SEE LIGHT
BIBLICAL REFLECTIONS ON SIGHT, INSIGHT, WISDOM AND COURAGE**

PART I

AND GOD SAW THAT ALL GOD WAS DOING WAS VERY GOOD!

**Keep your eyes on me
When you're lost in the dark***

The Bible begins with the beautiful and transforming narrative of God delighting in the World God creates. We pause to reflect on what it is that God sees. The Psalm prays, "In your light, O God, we see light!" (Psalm 36: 9). We will explore what it means to be seen by God and see like God.

**One day the sun admitted,
I am just a shadow.
I wish I could show you
the Infinite Incandescence**

**That has cast my brilliant image!
I wish I could show you,
When you are lonely or in the darkness,
The Astonishing Light
of your own Being!**

**Hafiz
1320? – 1389?**

**Awaken the spirituality of Catholics.
Each parish, with the support of the Diocese, will develop a plan within three years,
to inspire people to learn and implement the social justice teachings of the church.
Second Reno Diocesan Synod**

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***Keep your eyes on me**

Consider Genesis 1: 3:

God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.

"Light" is created quite illogically apart from the Sun and the Stars and other heavenly bodies. Night and Day unfold before the heavenly bodies are fashioned on the Fourth Day. This strange presentation underscores the nature of the "Creation Narrative." We are not dealing with a scientific thesis but with revelation. Great Spiritual Teachers have read this verse in terms of God being the Light by which the light of the Sun and Moon might shine. The Light of God is that Light by which all else is made, fashioned, shaped and called into reality. This "Light of God" is our peace, our salvation, our redemption, our insight (see Psalm 27: 1).

Consider Genesis 1: 26-28:

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

²⁷ So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God, God created them;
male and female God created them.

²⁸ God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

The Biblical Teaching that "we are made in the Image and Likeness of God" is quite extraordinary and insightful. At any given moment, the last thing we might feel and believe is that we are "the image of God." We might believe that we are called to grow in "the likeness of God" but that seems oftentimes to be more idealistic and doomed to failure. Yet, in the great human story of Creation that begins the Biblical Literature the human person is uncompromisingly declared to be "fashioned and made in God Image and Likeness" (see Genesis 1: 27). Consider also Psalm 139: 13-16:

¹³ You formed my inmost being;
you knit me in my mother's womb.

¹⁴ I praise you, because I am wonderfully made;
wonderful are your works!

My very self you know.
¹⁵ My bones are not hidden from you,
When I was being made in secret,
fashioned in the depths of the earth.
¹⁶ Your eyes saw me unformed;
in your book all are written down;
my days were shaped, before one came to be.

We are invited to see the World through the eyes of God. We are invited to see the beauty that is around us. Like God we are called to rejoice in the goodness of creation. When we open the eyes of our hearts to see and embrace the splendor of Creation, we break into song and join God in declaring the goodness of it all (see Genesis 1: 1, 4, 12, 18, 21, 25 and 31).

This response of God to what God has done, is doing and will do is not so much an evaluation as a discovery, a spontaneous response to the beauty God sees. The heart of God is touched and we are the Biblical witnesses to that moment of Divine intimacy when God rejoices in all that which God has done. The works of God bless God (see Psalm 103: 22).

God is influenced by what and who it is that God makes, shapes, forms, creates. As any artist will tell you, as every writer knows, the “artifact” takes on a reality that influences and recreates the artist. God is formed by that which God creates. In this moment of Divine intimacy, we witness in the Biblical Narrative the revelation of God. God, if you will “lights up” much like a parent beholding their child for the first time. Something astonishing happens to both Creator and Created. It is a timeless moment.

⁷And the LORD continued, “I have marked well the plight of My people in Egypt and have heeded their outcry because of their taskmasters; yes, I am mindful of their sufferings. ⁸I have come down to rescue them from the Egyptians and to bring them out of that land to a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey, the region of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁹Now the cry of the Israelites has reached Me; moreover, I have seen how the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰Come, therefore, I will send you to Pharaoh, and you shall free My people, the Israelites, from Egypt.”

Exodus 3: 7-10

The scream of a child alerts the parent to see what is happening. The parent instinctively “sees” through the eyes of the little one who is in danger. This “seeing” is more than observation of facts and circumstances. This “seeing” fashions the parent in the circumstances of their child. The broken-heartedness of the child, the panic of the little one, awakens the depth of parental love and compassion. This human

experience is the sum and substance of the Biblical Narratives concerning the justice and mercy of God.

¹⁵Can a woman forget her baby,
Or disown the child of her womb?
Though she might forget,
I never could forget you.
¹⁶See, I have engraved you
On the palms of My hands,
Your walls are ever before Me.

Isaiah 49: 15-16

¹³Cain said to the LORD, “My punishment is too great to bear! ¹⁴Since You have banished me this day from the soil, and I must avoid Your presence and become a restless wanderer on earth—anyone who meets me may kill me!” ¹⁵The LORD said to him, “I promise, if anyone kills Cain, sevenfold vengeance shall be taken on him.” And the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest anyone who met him should kill him. ¹⁶Cain left the presence of the LORD and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

Genesis 4: 13-16

The “eyes of God” are upon us according to the Biblical Narrative. These are the eyes of creative love, empathy and transformation. We are called to act accordingly in our daily lives as we journey through life. We are called to have our eyes wide open. Our hearts are uncompromisingly receptive of the person and needs of others. We are the Divine Image seeking and striving to be the Divine Likeness.

A “mark” is something one can see. God “marks” Cain with a sign by which Cain will be protected from harm! There is “curse of Cain” in the Biblical Narratives. God does for Cain what Cain did not do for his brother Abel. God sees in Cain what Cain cannot see in himself. We are called to see. Our eyes must be open so we do not harm others by making them invisible. The Church prays that our blindness be removed:

Lord our God, (Father / Mother) of all,
you guard us under the shadow of your wins
and search into the depths of our hearts.

Remove the blindness that cannot know you
and relieve the fear that would hide us from your sight.

Alternative Opening Prayer
For the Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Sacramentary

According to Genesis 1: 27, we, as human persons, are created in the “image and likeness” of God. These two terms “image and likeness” are related to seeing. To be sure, the human person is not a representation of God but the very expression of God’s creative and redemptive love in the World.

Jesus called the disciples to see like God sees. This “seeing” peers into the depth of another’s heart. We are challenged to see in another what we might not see in ourselves. We put aside harsh judgments and not judge by appearances (John 7: 24). Seeing another is to enter into their circumstances. We are motivated by compassion realizing our Divine Image and Likeness. We see in the harshness of others their need for love, empathy and compassion. If we are not careful and aware, we run the risk of being fashioned in their rage and rudeness rather than offering the memory that they are created in the Divine Image and Likeness. The “what” we see in another is always subject to “whom” we see when we encounter another person.

This is dramatically portrayed in the call of Nathaniel in John 1: 46. This rather mysterious narrative is driven by the act of seeing. The greater Narrative is driven by the beautiful response of Jesus to the disciples of the Baptizer seeking to know where Jesus dwells. Jesus says to them, “Come and see!” (John 1: 39). They are invited “to see” the dwelling place of the Word made Flesh. They enter into the deep recesses of Divine Intimacy witnessing first-hand the interplay of “enfleshed Word” and Divine Hospitality. In this context, Philip seeks out his companion Nathaniel. Philip invites Nathaniel to see what he sees. Faithful disciples help each other see the World around them.

We are called to see the Presence of God within us. This Divine Indwelling Presence sensitizes us to see with a passionate heart. Our open eyes are symbolic of our desire to open hearts. We must open the eyes of our hearts to see the World around us and the plight of so many of our Sisters and Brothers. The Divine Presence quickens us to see with the depth of our hearts so we may see with the eyes of our souls. We are called to see what it is that God sees and act accordingly. Thus faithful disciples become broken-hearted. We cannot care about that which we refuse to see. We cannot truly see unless the eyes of our hearts are truly wide-open. Consider the prayer of the Church:

Open our eyes to your deeds,
our ears to the sound of your call,
so that our every act may increase our sharing
in the life you have offered us.

Alternate Opening Prayer
Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time
Sacramentary

FOR ALL WHO GIVE YOU A FACE

For all who give you a face,
Lord Jesus,
by spreading your love in the world,
we praise you.

For all who give you hands,
Lord Jesus,
by doing their best for their brothers and sisters,
we praise you.

For all who give you a mouth,
Lord Jesus,
by defending the weak and the oppressed,
we praise you.

For all who give you eyes,
Lord Jesus,
by seeing every bit of love
in the heart of all peoples,
we praise you.

For all who give you a heart,
Lord Jesus, by preferring the poor to the rich,
the weak to the strong,
we praise you.

For all who give to your poverty,
Lord Jesus, the look of hope for the Kingdom,
we praise you.

For all who reveal you
simply by what they are,
Lord Jesus,
because they reflect your beauty in their lives,
we praise you.

Lucien Deiss
Biblical Prayers

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**IN YOUR LIGHT WE SEE LIGHT
BIBLICAL REFLECTIONS ON
SIGHT, INSIGHT, WISDOM AND COURAGE**

PART II

**CAN YOU SEE ANYTHING?
Keep your eyes on me
When it hurts too much to see***

Since Jesus sees what God sees (John 5: 19), we will walk with Jesus exploring what Jesus sees as he encounters the poor, afflicted, and marginalized of this World. Disciples of Jesus are called to see with the sight of the Lord. Our eyes are blessed with the baptismal insight of compassion for all beings as exemplified by Jesus. What might it mean to see with the heart and eyes of Jesus?

**In the wonder of the Incarnation
your eternal Word brings to the eyes of faith
a new and radiant vision of your glory.
In Jesus we see our God made visible
and so are caught up in love of the God we cannot see.**

**Preface
Christmas I
Sacramentary**

**Create a sense of loving community,
working together with the mission of developing a closer relationship with Jesus.**

Second Reno Diocesan Synod

***Keep your eyes on me
Tim McGraw Lyrics**

Consider John 5: 19-20:

¹⁹ Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. ²⁰ The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing; and he will show him greater works than these, so that you will be astonished.

According to John’s Gospel, Jesus had his eyes fixed on God. The works of Jesus and the works of God were essentially the same. We are called to look upon the works of Jesus that we might do what he has done. Surprisingly the Gospel of John records Jesus as saying, “we will do even greater works” (see John 14: 12). This “seeing” of the works of God revealed in Jesus takes us beyond imitation to empowerment. We are empowered to do the works of God on Earth. John 5: 1-47 is an endearing text. It speaks in loving terms as the hearer can easily discern that “the Son loves the Father and the Father loves the Son” (see John 3: 35 and 5: 20). The parental nature of God as Mother / Father is celebrated in this rather remarkable language. By virtue of the Spirit, we are invited to realize this love in the deeds of our lives. We like Jesus are called to see the World around us. We must become flesh – that is, involved in the affairs of daily life as we encounter others friend or foe.

We are forever walking by “Pools of Bethzatha” seeing hurting people crying out for aid, help, recognition or acceptance (see John 5: 1-9). In such situations, our word must become flesh with our hearts open and our hands extended. Consider the Address of Pope Francis to the Sangha Council of Buddhist Monks on November 29, 2017 in Myanmar:

The great challenge of our day is to help people be open to the transcendent. To be able to look deep within and to know themselves in such a way as to see their interconnectedness with all people. To realize that we cannot be isolated from one another. If we are to be united, as is our purpose, we need to surmount all forms of misunderstanding, intolerance, prejudice and hatred. How can we do this? The words of the Buddha offer each of us a guide: “Overcome the angry by non-anger; overcome the wicked by goodness; overcome the miser by generosity; overcome the liar by truth” (Dhammapada, XVII, 223). Similar sentiments are voiced in a prayer attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi: “Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love. Where there is injury, let me bring pardon... Where there is darkness, let me bring light, and where there is sadness, joy”.

We cannot be isolated from one another. Compassion throws a ray of light on the current situation of the World in which we live as members of our common family. How we treat the poor is the standard of our moral excellence or lack thereof. Following the wisdom of John 5: 19, we can see God sees what Jesus sees. The Crucified Jesus is no less than the recapitulation of the crucified peoples of all time. The tragic events of Calvary graphically portray the plight of the poor and hated, the rejected and feared, the lost and discarded.

Instead of casting the Cross of Jesus in terms of defeat and subsequent victory, it might be better to think in terms of uncompromising and faithful solidarity of Jesus with the sinner, failed and rejected. According to religion of Jesus, the Law of God can be “summarized” by the dramatic synthesis found in Leviticus 19: 18:

Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people,
but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.

Also consider the priority of the poor and “alien”:

⁹ When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. ¹⁰ You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I am the LORD your God.

Leviticus 19: 9-10

Psalms 119: 105 clearly teaches the Law of God is a Light unto our feet. It lights up the path along which we should walk. The “Golden Rule” belongs to the history of humankind’s enlightenment. The pathways of our lives direct us to the poor in whom we learn the ways of God. Deep in prayer, Jesus discovered the vocational call and impulse of his heart. Jesus broke away from the temptation offered by power and popularity. To the shock of his disciples, Jesus was empowered to be true to his heart following the light of his higher consciousness realizing his Divine status through humiliation. This humiliation of Jesus was the assault of the greedy and powerful whose “victory” rings hollow when the very purpose of human existence is the concern. My life, if it is not spent in the care of others, has no ultimate meaning or purpose. Consider Mark 1: 35-39:

³⁵ In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. ³⁶ And Simon and his companions hunted for him. ³⁷ When they found him, they said to him, “Everyone is searching for you.” ³⁸ He answered, “Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do.” ³⁹ And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Sometimes it is very difficult to see what is right of front of us. The healing of the blind is a most powerful miracle. Jesus healed the blind. Crowds, according to the Gospel writers, were more than impressed with such displays of power. Sight-giving is more than a display of power. It is a sharing of power, an awakening of power in the so-called afflicted. The deeper miracle is precisely this “sharing” of power awakening power in the soul of the other become companion. This “awakening” is the enlightenment of the Soul to see clearly. The “afflicted” of this World will now no longer be invisible. We must not be blinded by our beliefs, successes, fears, doubts or failures. Disciples are no longer blind. They see Jesus clearly in those loved by Jesus. Discipleship is not a matter of partiality (see Acts of Apostles

10: 34). A deeper appreciation of the “giving sight to the blind” stories reveal Jesus was offering people deeper insight into the situation at hand and their responsibility to see who and what others would not see. John 9: 1-41 is a powerful narrative exploring the implications of what it means to see.

We must work the works of the One who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

John 9: 4-5

This powerful verse is the prelude to the actual curing of the blind man in John 9: 1-41. We might ask the question, “How is Jesus present in the World?” As long as there are those who are blind, as long as there are those who will not see, as long as there are people who are hated, rejected or scorned, as long as these remain the Christ will be present among us as Light shining in the darkness. We must ask ourselves if we are willing to see.

The “cure” of the blind man in John 9: 1-41 is complex and achieves through a series of what can only be judged to be unnecessary rituals. But the twists and turns of this narrative underscore the courage of the man who was “born blind” but had the courage to see with his heart what his eyes could not see. The challenge is now in plain sight – are we willing to see the curbside beggar or not? No optometrist can be of assistance with this type of eye trouble. It is not a matter of the optic nerve but the heart. God experienced and saw that the first not-quite-human-person was alone. God saw the loneliness. God experienced the plight of the other. The first would-be human had no complaint. God sees what we often assume to be normal or acceptable. As humans created in the image and likeness of God, are we not designed to see and experience what God sees and experiences? The mud paste and spittle of John 9: 6-7 now come into sharp relief. Jesus refashions those who cannot or will not see in the image of their true likeness. Jesus creates, fashions, shapes and restores in the manner of his God in Heaven. Jesus “sees” what the Heavenly Father/ Mother does. Jesus follows the example of God empowering us to do the same.

The blind man who can now see has no idea it was Jesus who cured him (see John 9: 9-13). This Jesus works among us as one we do not know (John 1: 26). We ought not to be too surprised at his uncompromising presence among us. As long as there are those who cannot see, the Giver of Light and Life will work among us in ways elusive and mysterious.

There are great consequences in being able and willing to see. Our friend, the man born blind, has been casted into a ditch for daring to testify to Jesus. He speaks from his heart, his experience. His forceful proclamation is met with fierce rejection. Suddenly, friends, family and “those accustomed to seeing him beg” have no idea who he is. Rejected, our friend lives on the edge of being willing to be surprised. John 9: 35-41 is simply stunning:

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” ³⁶ He (the man born blind) answered, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.” ³⁷ Jesus said to him, “You

have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.”³⁸ He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him.³⁹ Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.”⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?”⁴¹ Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.

This is endearing rhetoric. It gives us bold example as to what it means to be an insightful disciple. If we would see because Jesus has touched us, then, we must be willing to see what Jesus sees. This requires effort, good will, conversion of heart and the willingness to have a broken heart for the sake of others. I become what and who I see. We have an obligation to see. We have an obligation and privilege to see the poor and see what they see.

There is a unique miracle of healing the blind in Mark 8: 22-2. It is the only miracle story in which the healing is not quite successful the first time.

²² They came to Bethsaida. Some people brought a blind man to him and begged him to touch him. ²³ He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village; and when he had put saliva on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, “Can you see anything?” ²⁴ And the man looked up and said, “I can see people, but they look like trees, walking.” ²⁵ Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he looked intently and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. ²⁶ Then he sent him away to his home, saying, “Do not even go into the village.

This story emphasizes the necessity to exert great effort. It is difficult to see that which we were trained not to see. Materialism, greed, racism, bigotry, sexism, etc. all make objects out of real people. Once a human person is objectified, they are no longer seen as fully human if human at all. It takes great effort to see as human what is regarded as less than human. Oftentimes, long before the beggars desire relief, they seek to be recognized.

There is a shocking scene in John 19: 31-37:

³¹ Since it was the day of Preparation, the authorities did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. ³² Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. ³³ But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. ³⁴ Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. ³⁵ (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.) ³⁶ These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled,
“None of his bones shall be broken.”

³⁷ And again another passage of scripture says,

“They will look on the one whom they have pierced.”

If we have the eyes of the Risen Jesus, we can see the crucified and pierced of this World. We will raise in their defense in our Assembly, prayer, ritual, study and outreach. We will protest against the powers of this World recognizing the dignity of all. We must be careful not to delay our vocation to see another person as formed and created in the image and likeness of God. We must not harm by practicing blindness so we can feel secure or content. We must see what happens to real people when the World refuses to see.

John 12: 21 makes references to those who came from afar to see Jesus. They inquired of Philip one of the Disciples of Jesus:

Sir, we would like to see Jesus!

What does it truly mean to see Jesus? The classic text of Matthew 25: xxxx answers that question in a most stunning manner. We ourselves, as disciples of Jesus, become the visible presence of Jesus in our outreach and works. We become poor for the sake of the poor. We, as disciples of Jesus, see in the poor no less than the Risen presence of the Crucified Jesus. This Crucified Lord who is our Risen Servant appears to us so way may be for others what Christ is for us. Matthew 25: 31-46 is driven by verse 37 with its crucial question. The answer might be never a day goes by when the Lord is not to be seen in the lowly and rejected.

Matthew 25: 31-40

³¹ “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³ and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.

³⁴ Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; ³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’

³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸ And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹ And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ ⁴⁰ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’

IN YOUR LIGHT WE SEE LIGHT

**BIBLICAL REFLECTIONS ON
SIGHT, INSIGHT, WISDOM AND COURAGE
(THREE INDEPENDENT REFLECTIONS)**

**PART III
DO YOU SEE THIS WOMAN?**

**Keep your eyes on me
When you can't find your way home***

Lifted high on the Cross, Jesus sees the World from a new vantage point. We are tempted to shut our eyes in grief but the Master would have us see the beginning of a new way of being and living. We gaze upon the Crucified to be transformed into a Community of Seers who will never again shut our eyes to the needs and hurts of others.

**Look upon us, O Lord,
and let all the darkness of our souls
vanish before the beams of thy brightness.
Fill us with holy love,
and open to us the treasures of thy wisdom.
All our desire is known unto thee,
therefore perfect what thou hast begun,
and what thy Spirit has awakened us to ask in prayer.
We seek thy face,
turn thy face unto us and show us thy glory.
Then shall our longing be satisfied,
and our peace shall be perfect.**

St. Augustine

**"We speak for the voiceless in our community and world,
seeking to advocate for the dignity of all and promote the unity
that we share as the creation of a loving God."**

**Planning Commission
Second Reno Diocesan Synod**

***Keep your eyes on me
Tim McGraw Lyrics**

Consider:

Luke 7: 36-50
Do you see this Woman?

³⁶ One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. ³⁷ And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. ³⁸ She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment. ³⁹ Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—that she is a sinner." ⁴⁰ Jesus spoke up and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." "Teacher," he replied, "speak." ⁴¹ "A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴² When they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?" ⁴³ Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt." And Jesus said to him, "You have judged rightly." ⁴⁴ Then turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. ⁴⁵ You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶ You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. ⁴⁷ Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little." ⁴⁸ Then he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." ⁴⁹ But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" ⁵⁰ And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Comment:

This powerful and important narrative raises several questions one of which is more than relevant to our own time and place. The question of Jesus to the rather rude Pharisee whom the woman redeemed by her graciousness invites us to reconsider our own attitudes concerning "others." The question may be fashioned in, at least, two different ways:

Do you see this woman?
or
Do you see the dignity of this woman?

While the "seeing" of Jesus has been understood in terms of the mystical traditions of humankind, we must not fall into the temptation to think of mysticism in abstract terms. Often the mystic and the social critic rise to the occasion demanding justice in the midst of cruelty and abuse. In other words, the mystic peers deeply into what ails us in such a way as

to empower us to uncompromisingly respond with creativity and courage. The consequences are enormous. Jesus will suffer a cruel and unjust execution because he rose to the defense of those who had no voice.

Consider the case of Mark 14: 1-9. Jesus recognizes and praises the nameless woman who anointed him against the day of his death. What she refused the Emperor she lavished upon Jesus – her anointing loyalty. She stands in the Gospel Narrative as the exemplar of the faithful disciple who is willing to comfort and recognize those which she is powerless to save from persecution and death. Jesus, for his part, declares the Gospel will be told in “memory of her” (see Mark 14: 9). Faithful disciples “see” the invisible of the World recognizing their dignity and importance.

THE GAZE OF JESUS

Paragraphs 99 and 100 from *Laudato Si* extend our understanding of the Incarnation into every aspect and element of the Natural World which is our common home as human persons. These two paragraphs conclude the section of Pope Francis’s Encyclical entitled “The Gaze of Jesus.” Francis challenges us to see with the eyes of Jesus as he muses on what Jesus sees in light of the New Testament witness. Consider:

99. In the Christian understanding of the world, the destiny of all creation is bound up with the mystery of Christ, present from the beginning: “All things have been created through him and for him” (*Colossians* 1:16). The prologue of the Gospel of John (1:1-18) reveals Christ’s creative work as the Divine Word (*Logos*). But then, unexpectedly, the prologue goes on to say that this same Word “became flesh” (*John* 1:14). One Person of the Trinity entered into the created cosmos, throwing in his lot with it, even to the cross. From the beginning of the world, but particularly through the incarnation, the mystery of Christ is at work in a hidden manner in the natural world as a whole, without thereby impinging on its autonomy.

100. The New Testament does not only tell us of the earthly Jesus and his tangible and loving relationship with the world. It also shows him risen and glorious, present throughout creation by his universal Lordship: “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross” (*Colossians* 1:19-20). This leads us to direct our gaze to the end of time, when the Son will deliver all things to the Father, so that “God may be everything to everyone” (*1 Corinthians* 15:28). Thus, the creatures of this world no longer appear to us under merely natural guise because the risen One is mysteriously holding them to himself and directing them towards fullness as their end. The very flowers of the field and the birds which his human eyes contemplated and admired are now imbued with his radiant presence.

We are the incarnation of the sight of Jesus in our time. We are called to see those who have become invisible to the powerful and greedy. Our ability and willingness to see the neglected and ignored, the despised and rejected, is their hope.

Reflection:

The dynamic and vital interconnection between the plight of the Earth and the plight of the poor is powerfully captured in Luke 16: 19-31. This unique story found only in the Gospel of Luke pointedly underscores the fact that the greedy man only sees the poor man when the poor man has something the greedy man wants. Even in the condition of “damnation” the greedy man only “sees” the poor man as his servant. The greedy man, even in the condition of damnation, demands favors from the poor man who is experiencing consolation in the bosom of Abraham. The greedy man still thinks of himself in terms of superiority as if his wealth gives him special status over and against everyone else especially the poor. The greedy man is so greedy it blinds him to his impoverished state as a person. Worst, the wealth, power and status of the greedy man blinded him to the plight of the poor. This is not a parable about the Afterlife and final damnation. It is a story based in the realities of everyday life. On what day are the blessed not called to see those in poverty and not come to their aid?

Consider Luke 16: 19-31:

¹⁹ There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰ And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹ who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. ²² The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³ In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴ He called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.' ²⁵ But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. ²⁶ Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.' ²⁷ He said, 'Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father's house— ²⁸ for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.' ²⁹ Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.' ³⁰ He said, 'No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' ³¹ He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'

Aid is one thing, justice and advocacy are also necessary if the dignity of the poor would be recognized and respected. In the Lucan parable, Abraham is the model of advocacy. The Father in Faith confronts the greedy man who only sees the poor man when he wants something. We ourselves are confronted with the searing questions as to how we as individual persons and communities treat the poor. The poverty that threatens the lives of the poor is created by economic injustice, governmental indifference and greed. Relief in the form of charity is insufficient in the face of systematic injustice.

Consider Mark 10: 4-52:

⁴⁶ They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. ⁴⁷ When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" ⁴⁸ Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" ⁴⁹ Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." ⁵⁰ So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. ⁵¹ Then Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said to him, "My teacher, let me see again." ⁵² Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

Reflection

The Courage to See:

Mark 10: 46-52 is a most remarkable text worthy of respectful and insightful attention. On his way to Jerusalem, Jesus, "passing through" Jericho with his disciples is informed that an unsighted man named Bartimeus was crying out to him for mercy. The unsighted could "see" with his hearing what those who see with their eyes can often not perceive with their hearts. This most remarkable man is the exemplar of the faithful and perceptive disciple who senses the presence of Jesus in most unlikely situations.

Surprisingly Jesus makes no effort to go to him. Rather it is Bartimeus who "runs" to Jesus once he is informed by the multitude that Jesus desires to meet him. Jesus does not treat this man as anything other than a complete human person worthy of respect, recognition and empathy.

The quest of Jesus is humorous. "What would you have me do for you?" reveals the fact that Jesus does not see a blind man to do what we might think is obvious. He seeks from Bartimeus what he would have him do. Bartimeus desires to "see again" (the Greek "ἀναβλέψω" implies seeing for the first time or seeing again).

Prayer:

Gracious God,

in you justice and mercy meet.
With unparalleled love you have saved us from death
and drawn us into the circle of your life.

Open our eyes to the wonders this life sets before us,
that may serve you free from fear
and address you as our God.

Alternate Opening Prayer
Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time
Sacramentary

Bartimeus sees in order to follow Jesus. Jesus made no such demand. Jesus told him to “go” but Bartimeus “followed” indicating his recovered eyesight is deeply revelatory of his insight into Jesus. Bartimeus not only enters into the fold of disciples but exemplifies what it means to be a Disciple of Jesus.

Consider Pope Francis from his “Joy of the Gospel”:

187. Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully a part of society. This demands that we be docile and attentive to the cry of the poor and to come to their aid. A mere glance at the Scriptures is enough to make us see how our gracious Father wants to hear the cry of the poor: “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them... so I will send you...” (Exodus 3:7-8, 10). We also see how he is concerned for their needs: “When the Israelites cried out to the Lord, the Lord raised up for them a deliverer” (Judges 3:15). If we, who are God’s means of hearing the poor, turn deaf ears to this plea, we oppose the Father’s will and his plan; that poor person “might cry to the Lord against you, and you would incur guilt” (Deuteronomy 15:9). A lack of solidarity towards his or her needs will directly affect our relationship with God: “For if in bitterness of soul he calls down a curse upon you, his Creator will hear his prayer” (Sirach 4:6). The old question always returns: “How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods, and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?” (1 John 3:17). Let us recall also how bluntly the apostle James speaks of the cry of the oppressed: “The wages of the labourers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts” (5:4).

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