

Homily – The Spiritual Journey is About Seeing Better

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On March 13, the County of San Luis Obispo declared a local emergency due to the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus. On March 18, the County of San Luis Obispo issued a Shelter At Home Order, effective March 19 at 5 PM.

This week is the six year anniversary of the Shelter at Home Order for us here in San Luis Obispo County. Those of you online from other parts of the country and world may have had earlier shelter dates. Can you remember the empty roads and silence? Can you remember the grocery store shelves? Can you remember being glued to the news as emergency rooms in New York City overflowed with sickness and death. Can you remember your first use of Zoom and Facebook Live? Six years ago all of us were flying blind. We did not know what to expect. It can be hard when we can't see where we are going.

Today's gospel reading is about being blind, or more specifically it is about Jesus healing the man who had been blind from birth. But the reading is also about the blame game and our deep need to know why things happen. "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" And, the reading is about Jesus who dared to heal the man on the Sabbath, the day of rest in which no work, even healing work, was to be done. And the reading is about whether bad people can do good things. And it is about speaking truth to power, and the fear the parents had towards the authorities. And it is about the broader ways that Jesus heals us from the various ways in which we are all blind. There is a lot for us to see in this passage about the man who had been blind but now he sees.

And in our Old Testament reading we have the selection of David as the next ancient king of Israel. One after another of Jesse's sons are brought before Samuel, but we are told "the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." It is not until the youngest son who is ruddy and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome, it is not until David is brought before Samuel, that the Lord identifies the next king of Israel, and Jesse anoints him. And the question this raises for me is how can we see as the Lord sees? How can we see by looking on the heart? And, I think the answer is to recognize that we are essential blind when we ignore the three-fold way of knowing. Let me explain.

Wisdom teacher, Cynthia Bourgeault teaches about the three-centered awareness of heart, mind, and body. There is wisdom in the emotions of our heart, in the thoughts of our minds, and in the kinesthetic moving centers of our bodies. Each person is pre-disposed towards one of these centers, but the goal is to have balance across all three

– heart, mind, and body. And, if you are like me, then you rely way too much on the thinking of the mind. To my detriment, I am often oblivious to the emotions that control me. If you are like me, then the path to wisdom and the kingdom of God, the path away from blindness, is to better understand and manage the emotions that are a normal part of life. I believe that the vast majority of humanity is emotionally illiterate. We don't recognize that the emotions that are happening to us won't kill us. Author Brené Brown points out that we often believe that we are thinking beings who sometimes feel. But she points out that we are really emotional beings who sometimes think. Emotions are a huge part of who we are, and until we pay more attention to the emotions of our hearts we will remain blind.

The most common way that we train our emotional heart is through art and music. Beauty is healing. And, art and music are the ways that most of us access beauty in all of its many forms. As children, some of us received training in art or music. But, it is never too late to bring art and music into your life. What new ways can you build art and music into your daily living?

We also train our hearts when we open them to others to love and be loved. We keep our heart space open through conscious love. Love is luring us forward, because love is what we already are at our core. Like an electromagnetic force, Infinite Love is drawing the world into the one fullness of love. When we are comfortable in our true identity, we will finally be unable to resist such overwhelming love. So don't fight it, resist it, or deny it now. Love will always win. Use love to train your heart center and overcome blindness.

And then there is prayer. Prayer, in all of its various forms, is opening our heart to God. It is filling us with love. Prayer is tapping into the true self that God has created in each and every one of us. All prayer disciplines are somehow trying to get heart, mind, and body to work as one, which entirely changes one's consciousness. Attention in the heart—this is the starting point of all true prayer. Art and music, love, and prayer are all ways to learn to manage our fears and the emotions of the heart. Knowing with the emotions of the heart. Knowing with the rational thoughts of our brains. Knowing with movement and our bodies. When we embrace the three-fold way of knowing we lean into the way that God has created us. We better see with the eyes of God. We take away a type of blindness that keeps us from living into our true selves.

Now, I want to switch from this general framework for overcoming blindness, and look at three specific ways we can see better. First, we need to see that God is in all and around all. We often have the mistaken belief that God is up there in heaven and not present with us in the here and now. However, there is not a breath that we take in which God is not present. As the saying goes, bidden or unbidden God is present.

And, God is not just present with us but is also present throughout of all of time and space. God is present with all and not just those that are part of our in-group. God is not just present here in the United States. God is present in all and around all. And when we see this it changes our perspective. We see differently. We are no longer blind which causes us to change the way we treat and respect others and all of creation. So first, we need to see Christ in all and around all.

Second, we need to see the hurt and need that is in our world. In my own life I often have blinders on so that I am oblivious to the wounds of others. I cocoon myself so that I don't have be brought out of my shell of self-interest. The ego is my driver, and I convince myself that others are not in need. However, when I take the blinders off and take the time to look at those around me, I may be driven to step away from my passivity and move into action. So, first we need to see Christ in all and around all, and then we need to see the needs of others.

And finally, we need to see the blessings that God has already given us. Each of us is equipped by God with talents and gifts that we are meant to share with others. When I see Christ in others, and see the needs of those others, and I can accept that I already have the gifts to help, then I can make a difference in the world. I don't need to wait for some future time when I have more money or time. I can act now to be the hands and feet and voice of Jesus in the world. Since the start of Covid six years ago sometimes I get the idea that I am more holed up at home than I used to be, and that we are all a bit more disconnected from the world around us. If this is happening, then is it time for us to follow the Holy Spirit back out into the world again?

Last week I talked about the four ways to read or interpret Scripture. We have a literal way to understand the healing of the man blind from birth, an event that happened two thousand years ago. We have the allegorical or symbolic way to understand in which we see the blindness is more that about eyesight. We have the moral method in which the passage helps us live our lives in a way that shines more of God's love into the world. And we have the anagogical reading of the passage as it points to eternal life.

Spirituality is about seeing. It is not about earning or achieving. It's about relationships rather than results or requirements. Once we see this the rest will follow. Two thousand years ago, Jesus healed the man blind from birth. And today, Jesus continues to heal us from our many forms of blindness. Embrace and lean into the three-fold way of awareness so that we know with our hearts, our minds, and our bodies. See Christ all around. See the needs of the world. And know that your gifts from God are already enough to make a difference. May we all see the beauty that God has created.