



“With My Own Eyes”

Fifth Sunday of Lent, Jeremiah 31:31-34, Hebrews 5:7-9, John 12:20-33

I remember the first time I was in the exam room as the ophthalmologist tested various prescription strengths for glasses. “Which is better ... 1 or 2 ... 2 or 3?” Soon afterwards, my first prescription eyeglasses arrived, and I was amazed that the blur in my vision was gone! I no longer had to strain to see the chalkboard at school or road signs as I was driving. No longer did I get dizzy when I looked through binoculars or sat in the nose-bleed seats at stadiums. I could see, and seeing no longer troubled me.

I think the same is true in our spiritual life. Allow me to assume that we all want to see Jesus, just like the Greeks who asked Philip in this week’s Gospel (Jn 12:21). Isn’t that the point of Christianity? We need help to see him, and we need people in our lives to help make that initial introduction. I had many “first introductions” to faith in Jesus when I was younger. I grew up in a strong Catholic family and went to Catholic schools. I was involved in many activities in my home parish and have led hundreds of retreats around the country telling people about my faith in Jesus. But I wondered if I had really seen Jesus when I was a young adult doing all these things. Even now, in monastic life, I’ve asked myself, “What is the instrument to use so I can see Jesus?”

In his Way of the Cross 2005, then-Cardinal Ratzinger meditates with us that, “Only with the heart can we see Jesus. Only love purifies us and gives us the ability to see. Only love enables us to recognize the God who is love itself.” So it is the heart, not the eyes nor the mind, which gives us the capacity to see Jesus. That is why we pray, in this week’s Psalm Response, for a clean heart because, let’s be honest, our hearts are not always clean on the inside. It can be host to a great many number of residents who are not Jesus, who wants to be the sole presence there. Some of these guests-of-the-heart pay only a short visit, while others are long-standing guests. Each of these guests leaves dirty or damaging marks on our hearts that are not easy to clean or repair of our own accord. Deep down, we know we need help, but we are often afraid to ask because, as Pope Benedict XVI says elsewhere:

“One aspect of [following Jesus] is having to leave behind what everyone else thinks and wants, the prevailing standards, in order to enter the light of the truth of our being, and aided by that light, to find the right path.”

We’d rather see with our eyes (according to the standards of society) and our minds (according to our own personal preferences and securities). In so doing, we maybe get only a partial and blurry glimpse of who Jesus is. Along this point, I am reminded of that poignant scene in “The Return of the Jedi” wherein the dying Darth Vader says this to his son, Luke, “Just for once, let me look on you ... with my own eyes.” And so Luke takes off the helmet of his father, revealing his true face and providing a moving last-encounter between the two for moviegoers.

If we really are intent on allowing our heart to see Jesus, then our hearts must be rehabilitated in order to see him. The damage left upon our hearts by these guests-of-the-past need restoration (or in Catholic terms, conversion) in order for that capacity of the heart to be used appropriately. This is why the grain of wheat must die in order to produce fruit. This is why losing life is the avenue to gain it.

In my adult age, I know that I need my eyeglasses to see clearly. Conversely, I know that without them, my vision gets blurry and doubled, just like it used to be. In a very similar way, the eyes of our heart need “adjustments” that only come about through repentance and conversion in order for us to really see Jesus clearly. Lent is a great time to receive these “adjustments.”

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Prayer for a Pure Heart

Heavenly Father, My desire is to have a clean and pure heart before You without the sinful desires, wickedness, bitterness, or anger that keeps me from You.

Forgive me for sinning against You with my spirit, my actions, and my words.

Please help me to retain the joy, happiness, and peace that You offer us throughout our trials. Because of the pain Lord, it is often difficult to smile and to keep myself from bitterness and anger.

Father, I cannot do any of this in my own power. My flesh is weak and I easily become bitter. I believe that Your grace is sufficient and that I can only have a pure heart in Your strength and power.

Please grant me the strength, wisdom, and power to turn this situation over to You completely.

Allow my spirit, actions, and attitudes to reflect You and Your immeasurable grace.

In Jesus’ holy name. Amen.