

Blind Spots

Picture this: Julie, in the fourth grade, is struggling with arithmetic and after working for hours, she gets her homework done and she is so excited! Everything came together! She rushes into the living room and excitedly says: "Look, Daddy, I got my homework done perfectly!" Dad - who's in the middle of watching a basketball game, brushes her aside implies Julie don't bother me now can't you see I'm watching the game?!"

Another father is so overwhelmed by love for his daughter that he writes a song: "*Isn't She Lovely,*" in her honor. His name is Stevie Wonder — blind from birth.

Which father is really blind?
Which father really sees his daughter?

It's Saturday morning, Linda has been going through a difficult time: feeling down on herself..., a bit empty, ...unattractive. She prepares a nice breakfast for her husband hoping that he will have time to sit with her and to listen to her hopes and her hurts. But his only concern was to ask her if she has washed his golf shirt yet... .

Another husband is so in love with his wife that he composes a love song for her:
*"You are so beautiful to me: You're everything I hoped, You're everything I need,
You're so beautiful to me!"*
His name is Ray Charles — blind from birth.

Which husband truly sees his wife?
Which husband is truly blind?

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Now I don't mean to dump on fathers and husbands this morning, but I think those two stories connect with today's Gospel.

A man, who like Stevie Wonder or Ray Charles is *born* blind, is healed by Jesus; the Pharisees are born with sight — but obviously are *spiritually* blind. The Gospel text asks us: *Who is really blind?*

Overflowing with love, Jesus is passionate that the blind man see. With a spit of mud and a bath in a pool, the man's eyesight is birthed! But Jesus wants more for the man, he desires that he see with the "eyes of his heart" – insight, compassion, love, mercy. This man will become a witness for God; by the end of the story, he truly sees with eyes and heart.

The Pharisees, on the other hand, the religious officials, the "clerics" we might say, by the end of the story are hurling insults at the man, shutting their ears to his testimony and throwing him out of their presence!

In other words, the Pharisees become increasingly blind through the story and by the end, they are clinging to their spiritual blindness — eyes and hearts tightly shut.

Sisters and brothers, the heart of today's Gospel story is all about spiritual blindness which is so hard to heal. Sometimes we can get used to the darkness, like we can become used to the light. Sometimes, at least on the surface, we would rather lie in the darkness that we know – rather than take the risk to live in the light that we don't know. Just ask any addict....

When we see someone clinging to social, ethnic, homophobic, sexist, religious prejudices that they learned as a child we can see this type of blindness in action.

Sometimes like the Pharisees we are blind to the grace, goodness, hope, love, forgiveness, ...to Faith that is right in front of us!

Again, in today's Gospel, the Disciples – blinded by the prejudice and belief system of their day – were convinced that the poor guy was blind because he sinned or, at least, his parents sinned. Jesus was quick to correct their blind belief by informing them “that neither the man nor his parents sinned. He was born blind.”

2000 years later we still struggle with this spiritual blindness. How many religious “Pharisees” proclaimed with certainty that AIDS was a punishment from God for the evil ways of gay people? Or, that this or that earthquake or hurricane is God's punishment on our evil ways?

Pretty sick, but spiritual blindness is a reality — and temptation for us all.

Sisters and brothers, our Lenten Journey — our spring cleaning of our hearts — is a journey of examining the blind spots that keep us in the dark. Our spring cleaning is a time to recover from our blindness that can take on many forms such as prejudice, self-interest, narrowness of view; a time to recover from our blindness that can affect our relationships, our families, our business or politics, our ways of acting in society, and the list goes on.

The most tragic, horrendous and damaging example of spiritual blindness in our global, national and local Catholic Church in our lifetime, has been the sexual abuse of children and vulnerable adults by – primarily – clergy, as well as other members of the church and the scandalous cover-up by the Hierarchy. Thanks to the Boston Globe and other media investigations, this dark, blind horror was exposed and because of the cries of the people, the Catholic Church now has some of the most effective children's protection procedures in the Nation.

As you may recall, our Diocese of Syracuse filed for reorganization under Chapter 11 of the US Bankruptcy Code on June 19, 2020 in an attempt to be responsible for reparation in a fair and equitable manner to those individuals who have been harmed through abuse going back decades. If there is ever to be any healing, the Church must make amends, reparations to the victims and their families.

Our Diocese reports that there are a total of 411 claims involving clergy, religious, lay employees and volunteers, which is obviously deeply disturbing. The result of legal mediation will be the creation of a Victims Fund to compensate fairly each victim and their families. Although, to date, no Parish funds have been used to cover any expenses related to the abuse crisis (as the Diocese has assured us since the beginning of the abuse scandal), the entire Diocesan family – including parishes – will be invited to contribute to the Victims Fund. At this moment, we don't know when, or how much the total cost will be. Obviously, it will be considerable.

As your Pastor, with the support of our Pastoral Team and Pastoral Counsel, I pledge to you today that any Parish funds that will or will not be contributed to the Diocesan Victim Fund will be a Parish decision with each parishioner invited to give input, with an ultimate Parish vote. A Letter from Bishop Lucia is enclosed in our Bulletin and on the Parish website with details of the state of the Diocesan Chapter 11 process.

It is important that our whole Parish be informed as this journey of reparation and, hopefully, healing continues. To this end, I invite anyone who, after reading the Bishop's Letter, would like to share your thoughts, concerns or questions, to gather after each of the masses next weekend, here in the Sanctuary for a listening session. We will share the results with our Bishop in a letter.

Let us pray that the light of the Spirit burn through the spiritual blindness of our Church.

Let us pray:

*O God, our Light of Truth, Beacon of Hope and Fire of Love,
in your Light, we see Light; without You we grope in darkness and shadows.
Give us new eyes, that we see the suffering of others.
Give us new eyes, that we glimpse our own self-righteousness.
Give us new eyes, that we recognize you in the face of the stranger and the outcast and the
haughty.
Give us new eyes that we may look at the world that you so love, with forgiveness, patience
and hope Amen!*