

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

The question begs to be asked, "Who are the real blind people?"

Exhibit one is the man begging along the road to Jericho. He had no use of his eyes—he could not see. As the sound of a crowd approaches, he asked what was going on, for he couldn't see what was happening. He was told that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. If it weren't for the noise of the crowd—the commotion of those clamoring around Jesus—the beggar would have had no clue that Jesus was passing by; the beggar would not have been able to pick Jesus out of a crowd. But, having been told, he grabbed at his chance! Barely audible over the din of the crowd, he called out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" It didn't work, but for the crowd telling him to be quiet. He called out louder, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

That caught Jesus' attention. He stops in His tracks and motions that the man be brought to Him. Speaking to the man, Jesus asks, "What do you want me to do for you?" "Lord, that I may receive my sight." "Receive your sight," Jesus replies. "Your faith has saved you."

So, this man by the Jericho road couldn't see until Jesus healed him. Until then, he couldn't be influenced by what his eyes perceived, for they perceived nothing. He knew only what he had heard. It must be deduced that this man had heard of Jesus of Nazareth and what He had done. It must be deduced that this man had heard the Scriptures, perhaps even heard them explained. He was able to put two and two together and "see" that this Jesus of Nazareth was the One promised in the Scriptures—the seed of the woman (cf. Genesis 3:15), the Prophet promised of Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15-19), the Suffering Servant (cf. Isaiah 53), the Shepherd of the sheep (cf. Ezekiel 34), etc. He called out toward the crowd, unable to discern which individual was Jesus, "Son of David!"

The blind man wasn't merely acknowledging Jesus' lineage. The man was calling out to the promised Descendant of the greatest king of Israel, who would reign on the throne forever. "The LORD said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.'" (Psalm 110:1) This King would be no ordinary king, but the King of kings, Lord of lords—the very God of very God. Now, Jesus—King, Lord, and God—is walking on the road along which he begs, and he begs for his sight: "Lord, that I may receive my sight." "Lord," the man calls Jesus, as if to confirm what he means by calling Him Son of David.

The beggar along the Jericho road may not have been able to see with his eyes, but he certainly wasn't blind to who Jesus was and the salvation that He had come to bring—he had God-given faith to trust in Jesus for all that was promised of Him in the Scriptures. He saw Jesus for who He was, even though He could not see Jesus in the flesh. Perhaps, though, the Son of David would be kind enough to give him a foretaste of the salvation that was to come with the reception of sight. "Your faith has saved you," Jesus said. "Yes, you shall see with your eyes, now, but your faith has saved you for eternity."

I have made a mountain out of this molehill before, and it's worthy of doing so every time. The Greek text does not say what your English translations often, perhaps always, say. The blind man was not healed on account of his faith, but by the singular action of Jesus. The same is said to the woman with the flow of blood and the leper who returns to give thanks to Jesus when He had healed ten of them. (cf. Luke 8:48; Luke 17:19) Grammatically, the Greek of the text can be translated as your translations do, but contextually, the text doesn't allow for it; there is more going on when Jesus says what He says, especially since He uses the same phrase to the one leper when all ten were healed.

Healing is not a result of faith, not something that your faith grasps on to to make your own; if that were the case, there would be no sick Christians—no Christians with cancer or the flu or measles—or if there are, it's because their faith isn't strong enough to ward off illness. Healing and good health do not follow faith, but forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation do, for these were won for you on the cross where Jesus died, and apprehended by the faith that God has given you in your baptism and hearing of the Word.

"For by grace you have been saved through faith..." (Ephesians 2:8a)

Who are the real blind people? Exhibit two is the disciples. Pick any one of them or all of them. Jesus pulled the twelve aside and told them—again—about his coming Passion:

Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished. For He will be delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon. They will scourge Him and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again.

This isn't the first time Jesus had told them this. Yet, the twelve looked at each other confusedly. They didn't understand Him; what Jesus had told them was hidden from them, and they did not know the things Jesus spoke to them.

You would almost expect at least one of them to jump up and say, "No, Teacher, not you!" (cf. Matthew 16:22) Perhaps someone might have gotten it at this point, having read and heard the Scriptures, learning from Jesus these past three or so years, and seeing Jesus do the things that He's done—couldn't someone other than a blind man make the connection? Well, maybe the fact that they were able to see regularly clouded the truth to them so that what Jesus told them was hidden from them. That Jesus was the Prophet like Moses, Suffering Servant, and Shepherd of the people just didn't dawn on them.

So, the disciples had working eyes, they could see Jesus and what He was doing, but they were unable at this point to perceive who Jesus was or what He had come to do.

Who are the real blind people? Exhibit three are the people in the seats here. That would be you, dear hearers.

Now, I know of no one here—no member of this congregation, in fact—who has lost the use of their eyes, or who never had working eyes to begin with. No one here is physically blind. Some have better use of their eyes than others, evidenced by the fact that some wear glasses or contact lenses while others do not. So, if I hold up my hand and extend some fingers, most everyone should be able to say how many fingers I'm holding up.

However, no one here has seen Jesus with their eyes. If Jesus were to walk past you (you know, without any fanfare), you would have no clue it was Him, just like the beggar. Unless He were pointed out to you, you wouldn't know to call out to Him—for mercy or anything else—just like the beggar. In that respect, you are just as blind as the beggar.

Now, this is not your fault. You were just born at the wrong time to look upon Jesus when He walked the earth as an ordinary, humble man. (cf. Philippians 2:5-11) In fact, Jesus now hides His human nature so that you may not yet look upon Him, but seek Him where He may be found (cf. Isaiah 55:6), namely in His Word and Sacraments, as He is spoken into your ears for your hearing, forgiveness, life, and salvation, and placed into your mouths under bread and wine for your eating, forgiveness, life, and salvation.

At the same time, the struggle you have with seeing Jesus in the His Word and Sacraments is phenomenal. Like the disciples, even though you hear the same things time and time again, you just don't get it, at worst, and at best, you only get it marginally to the point where you would respond like Peter did that one time, "No way, Lord!"

- Holy Baptism appears to be plain water, yet the Word of God calls it a life-giving washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit which now saves you. (cf. Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 3:21) How can water do such great things? It's not just the water, folks, but the Word of God in and with the water. The water's important and necessary, but the Word of God makes it what it is, "A life-giving water, rich in grace, and a washing of the new birth in the Holy Spirit."
- Holy Absolution sounds like simple words spoken by a simple man, yet the Word of God declares that when the placed man of God speaks these words in your hearing, it's "just as valid and certain, even in heaven, as if Christ our dear Lord dealt with us Himself." It was the night that Jesus rose from the dead when He told His disciples, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." (John 20:23)

- Holy Communion looks to be only bread and wine. It tastes like a bland morsel bread and a bit of sour wine. But the Word of God, Jesus Himself, with His own words says of the bread, "This is my body," and of the wine, "This is my blood." (cf. Matthew 26:26, 28) And so the Sacrament of the Altar is "the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ Himself for us Christians to eat and to drink," given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.

Your senses tell you otherwise, blinding you to the truth of God's Word. "No way, Lord!" But Jesus says this thing, and His Word makes the thing what it is. You have a hard time understanding it—it is hidden from you, and you do not know the things Jesus speaks to you. In this respect, you are just as blind as the disciples.

Still, Jesus comes to you and continually gives of Himself to you. Just as He repeated Himself to the disciples, telling them of His coming Passion for them and for you, so He comes to you time and again in Word and Sacrament to give Himself to you in order that you might have, again and again, the benefits of His giving of Himself for you on the tree of the cross. He has established His Bride, the Church, in order that you would have a haven apart from this world where He promises to meet you with His grace and benefits. And in the Church, He has established the Office of the Holy Ministry through which He gives of Himself to you as He and His crucifixion are proclaimed to you and given to you in the Sacraments.

In many pulpits around the world are inscribed a verse or two from the Scriptures, placed there as a reminder and stark warning to the man who ascends into it. Some have this passage from 1 Corinthians: "For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare for battle?" (1 Corinthians 14:8) Some have another passage from 1 Corinthians: "[W]oe is me if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 Corinthians 9:16b) Some may even have a Latin proverb inscribed in them, which translates to, "He who ascends with fear descends with honor." Yet, some have a verse from John's Gospel that is very appropriate for today's text: "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." (John 12:21b)

"Sir, we wish to see Jesus," is an invitation from the congregation and a reminder and warning to the pastor to give the people Jesus Christ and Him crucified from the pulpit. It is a reminder of the command that Jesus gives to His called ministers to tell His people of the wonderful deeds that He has done for them. The pastor is to show God's people Jesus, in all of His humiliation and glory, in truth and clarity, no matter how you may receive Him—with joy and thanksgiving over the wonderful things that He has done for you, and with grief and disdain because He calls you to repentance over your sins.

So, the prayer of the man who ascends this pulpit is,

O Lord God...since Thou hast appointed me to be a pastor and teacher, and the people are in need of the teaching and the instructions, O be Thou my helper and let Thy holy angels attend me. Then, if Thou art pleased to accomplish anything through me, to Thy glory and not to mine or the praise of men, grant me out of Thy pure grace and mercy a right understanding of Thy Word and that I may also diligently perform it...Send Thy Holy Spirit that He may work with me, yea, that He may work in me to will and to do through Thy divine strength according to Thy good pleasure.

Jesus is quick to answer this prayer. Despite the failings of this man—the sins and blindness that he deals with as much as you do—Jesus comes to you through Him, as through means. Jesus shows Himself to you, hidden in the Word and Sacraments, and He has His way with you. Through the man, Jesus tells you that He has fulfilled all righteousness for you, becoming one with you in His incarnation, keeping the whole Law of God perfectly in your place, identifying with you in His own baptism, taking your sins into His own flesh, and dying under the full wrath of God in your place on the cross.

There is, now, no wrath of God for you. Baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, you are the righteousness of God in Him. Into you Jesus places Himself by Word and Sacrament—in ear and mouth. Your eyes and ears of faith see and receive your Lord and Savior perfectly, though your own fallen flesh and senses do get in the way. And since by faith you perfectly apprehend Jesus, then you are given the merits which He has won for you on the cross: salvation, life, the forgiveness of all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.