



From A Bishop's Journal (738)

Family- and Parish-Based Catechesis on Peace (4) "The Lord Looks into the Heart"

To help us better understand our own history, sacred history, and that of all nations and peoples, it appears to me that we should often recall God's words to Samuel, when He chose a king for His people: "Not as man sees does God see, because man sees the appearance but the Lord looks into the heart." For anyone who strives to be a peacemaker, it is important to look at people and events with the heart of God.

The Origin of Handicaps

Throughout the centuries many are those who have wondered why so-and-so was physically handicapped from birth. Why is that person deaf, blind, or lame? Why are some of them multiply handicapped? It is not easy to come up with a satisfactory answer to such questions, especially when one sees in them a sign of guilt or the "vengeance of God." If we have had to wait until the twentieth century to better understand the link between a mental handicap and a defective chromosome, according to studies by geneticist Jerome Le Jeune (1926-1994), a passionate defender of life, we must not be surprised that in the days of Jesus a baby born blind meant that its parents or someone else had sinned against God. So, to be a peacemaker one must be "just" as much towards God as towards one's fellow humans. We must do away with such non-Christian expressions as "God didn't want so-and-so to see, to hear, to walk," when throughout the Gospels it is stated over and over again that Jesus came that we may have life, and life to the full.

A Centuries-Old Trial

The Gospel story of the man born blind who was cured by Jesus witnesses to the long tradition of blaming a human infirmity on the express will of God. Out of compassion – and even though it was the Sabbath – Jesus spat on the ground, mixed mud with his saliva, smeared the man's eyes with the mud, and cured him of his blindness. The man regained his sight. It is obvious that Saint John's story reflects sacramental rites of baptism. Concerned about stressing that Christian baptism is an extraordinary illumination, Saint John reports an incident in Jesus' life which marked the Church's beginning and still marks it today. So many men and women today among us are blind: they cannot see nor welcome the wonders that God works for them, in His kindness. The Church, too, sees herself in the blind man who is given light and life by God. The Church proclaims: Jesus is the light of the world.

A Striking Trial

Despite certain appearances of indifference or unbelief, our contemporaries are still “fond” of learning about anything that can have happened to a loved one in the last few hours. It comes as no surprise to read about the blind man’s and his parents’ interrogations. We can sense gratitude to the “healer,” along with great prudence regarding him. The parents have an extraordinary response: “He is of age – ask him!” The investigation continues, the fact of there being a miracle cannot be disputed, though the prophet continues to be very discrete. Still, Jesus seeks out the man who was manhandled and thrown out bodily by the authorities, and asks him: “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” And the newly-healed answers simply: “I do believe, Lord.” It is then that Jesus once again reveals his mission: “I came into this world to divide it, to make the sightless see and the seeing blind.”

A Serious Question

For fear of being treated as the blind leading the blind, we must often repeat this humble prayer to the Lord: “Open my eyes, O Lord, to the wonders of your love. I am the blind man on the road, heal me, that I may see you. Open my hands, O Lord, these hands that always want to grasp. The poor man stands at my door, teach me to share. Help me walk, O Lord, however difficult is the road: I want to follow you to the cross, take me by the hand. O Lord, make me hear the call of my brothers crying to me. May my heart not be closed to their calls and appeals. Watch over my faith, O Lord, there are so many voices to declare your death. When evening comes with the burden of the day, be with me, O Lord” (*Liturgy of the hours*, Fr. ed.).

Look with the Heart

Humankind as a whole could have avoided so much distress if leaders of the world past and those of today had seen the world not with their own hearts but with the eyes of the heart of God. So many wars could have been avoided! So much useless suffering would have been prevented, they could have inspired countless youths to work for peace and not for war. The blind man healed by Jesus can help us achieve this clarity: “Clever as a snake and innocent as a dove,” as Jesus said, the cured man did not let himself be trapped by the endless questioning of those who seemingly held the truth: he now had a totally different “view” of people and events – as his parents did: though they were rightfully afraid, they did not let themselves get caught in the web! Peace can only be brought about by one with a loving heart, whose eyes are open to the reality around. Otherwise, one builds on imagination, sometimes for the most inhuman of motives. The man born blind was not a symbol of evil; he was not produced by terrorism or the axis of evil. He was an image of our own human condition, which is capable of withdrawing into itself, but also of opening itself to the reality of the divine presence, the reality of the Messiah at the heart of our lives. “Lord, help us see our brothers and sisters with your eyes, and love them with your heart.”

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