

Rev. Derek Fairman

2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time A

Think about the last time that someone told you to look at something. Maybe it was to determine whether you were seeing the same thing. Maybe it was to point out something interesting. Maybe it was to make sure that you were paying attention. Whatever it was, no doubt we like to find out what it is that someone is looking at. That helps us to understand the Gospel for this Second Sunday in Ordinary Time.

We hear in the Gospel that St. John the Baptist gave a reason for the work he was doing. He was baptizing in the desert with water so that the Lord Jesus would be made known to Israel. Now, we might wonder how a baptism with water would make the Lord Jesus known to Israel. There are no doubt many legitimate answers to this question, but the one that I want to focus on is the idea that by turning away from sin, the people of God were allowing their spiritual senses to be opened.

No doubt we are familiar with the five physical senses: sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell. In a way, though, we have our spiritual senses too that help us to experience God's presence. Without faith, we cannot truly understand who the Lord Jesus is, but with faith, we can recognize God's presence through our spiritual senses. St. John the Baptist points out the Lord Jesus as the Lamb of God, but it would have taken faith for the people of that day to recognize it. Without faith, the people would not have recognized the Lord Jesus.

Faith opens up our spiritual sight. Sometimes we hear the expression, "the eyes of faith," that we walk by faith and not by sight. Without faith, we tend to view the world from a point of view in which we are the center of everything. We desire only what serves us, we care about our own needs, and the needs of others are secondary or not important. We identify things and people as somehow important because they have to do with us. We don't recognize anything around us except as the product of nature or the result of our own actions.

When we have faith, however, our spiritual eyes are opened and we see things differently. Instead of us being at the center of everything, we begin to take others and their needs into consideration. We begin to look at things and people from God's point of view, realizing that we are only a small part of a much larger world. We begin to see things from the point of view of eternity, and we see God's work throughout creation. We see His hand guiding us as well as those things happening in our lives. Our spiritual eyes are able to see supernatural causes instead of only natural ones.

Faith opens up our spiritual ears. For those without faith, the words of the Gospel and the entire Bible are interesting words but just words like those of any other book. They do not stir the person's faith, since there is none. They do not penetrate to the heart. Without faith, we only hear what we want to hear, and we only hear what makes us happy. We ignore the rest. When we have faith, though, our spiritual ears are open. We hear the words of Scripture and they inspire us, they console us, they renew our faith and they bring us joy. They do challenge us to do better, but that does not take away our joy. When we have faith, the Scriptures penetrate our hearts and change our hearts to be more loving and caring, and to empathize with the needs of others.

Faith helps us to taste the Lord's goodness. We are familiar with the Scripture, taste and see the goodness of the Lord. Well, without faith, there is nothing but this world; the only things to taste are the things of this world. Without faith, there is no reason not to enjoy the pleasures that this world has to offer, since that is all there is. Faith allows our spiritual senses to experience the fulfillment and beauty that only God's presence can give us. Perhaps you have experienced that when you come into church, or when you pray.

Faith helps us to experience God's touch. God's presence can be consoling and healing, when we need those. Without faith, there is only the cold and stark reality of being alone and on our own. Without faith, there is only emptiness, and a void that needs filled with the things of this world. Faith opens us up to the warmth of God's presence and the comfort of knowing that we are not alone, but that God walks with us on our journey. With faith, we can recognize that the Lord Jesus is helping us to carry the cross that we must endure. With faith, our souls can receive joy and fulfillment.

We can recognize God's presence with faith. Unfortunately, there are many whose spiritual senses are dulled to the point that, not only do they not perceive spiritual realities, but also they do not understand that their senses are dulled or that these sense exist at all. It is one thing to know that you are sick and perhaps need treatment; it is another to be sick but be convinced that nothing is wrong. How do you convince someone that he or she is sick, if the person does not acknowledge any symptoms? That was the challenge for St. John the Baptist and for us as well, as we seek to bring others to have greater faith. There is no easy answer, but we keep trying, and we keep praying, knowing that only God can give someone faith and open the spiritual senses that people have.

As we approach the altar, we know that we can be somewhere in the middle. Yes, our faith helps us to see God's hand in things, but we also recognize that there are times in which we don't see people as God does, when we are selfish and think of ourselves first. There are times in which the Gospel stirs our faith, and there are times when we ignore the challenges it offers. There are moments in which we taste the Lord's goodness, and times when we taste what the world has to offer. There are moments in which our hearts receive God's touch, and times when we look for comfort elsewhere. Our prayer is that God will increase our faith and open our spiritual senses to recognize His presence.