

Good evening/morning everyone!

I am sure most of you will have seen the recent Specsaver ad on telly in which a number of people are asked how much money they want to give up their eyes. The response, of course, is that no one in his right mind is prepared to do so, - Who wants to be blind at the expense of their sight?

That question raises a topic that runs through the Gospel readings we've listened to these last three Sundays. A fortnight ago we heard about a rich young man who came to Jesus to ask what he needed to do to gain eternal life, - who then turned away sad when Jesus suggested that he sell all his possessions, and follow him.

Last week we heard James and John ask Jesus to do them a favour, and Jesus responds with: "What do you want me to do for you?", and they ask for a place in the box-seat. Today both these elements come back in the Gospel we have today.

On meeting the blind man Jesus asked the same question he asked of James and John: "What do you want me to do for you?" and receives the answer "Lord, that I may see!", and seeing his faith and hunger for a cure Jesus heals him. But, before he met Jesus, after shouting: "'Son of David, Jesus, have pity on me?" he did something significant as he rushed to meet Jesus, - he threw off his cloak, - he did what the rich young man had been unable to do, - he left behind all his possessions, and after the cure, followed Jesus.

In giving us these three connected readings the Church is asking us to join the dots, to recognize that the common thread running through these readings is blindness, - blindness to the possessive power of riches for the young man; blindness to the alluring power of fame for James and John, and awareness of the limiting power of physical blindness, and seeking to be freed of its hold, by the blind man. His plea: "Lord, that I may see!" is a reminder to us to be aware of the different forms of blindness we may be subject to, and to seek its healing.

One of these forms is moral blindness, the blindness which cripples our conscience from recognizing right from wrong. We're all born with a conscience which develops as we grow, is fine-tuned by experience, and enlightened by the Gospel.

But selfishness can cause it to change direction. Rather than focus on what is good it begins to focus on self, with disastrous consequences for society at large, and for oneself, in the long run, as well.

Think, for example of the tragedy of people who harm others, and couldn't care less; the pathological liar who tells so many lies, and yet can't be bothered a bit; the person who can take another's property without batting an eyelid, the person who can slander another without giving it a second thought, and so on. Such people have no loyalty, no truth, no guilt, no shame, and no regrets because they have blinded their conscience to favour themselves. Imagine what it must be like to live with a person who has no conscience.

Another kind of blindness is the blindness of unbelief. Faith gives us a vision to see beyond the senses, beyond the world around us, to its deeper truth that this world comes to us as a gift from God, and that it is the means of our journey back to God as well.

Faith enables us to see that we are more than cell and bone, more than our DNA, more than the chemicals and events that happen inside us. We are more than our emotions and feelings; more than our IQ. We have a soul, a spirit, a purpose and a destiny. Through the glasses of faith we can see that however others may see us, God sees in us a person with an immortal soul who has a destiny to live with Him forever. Faith enables us to see more in ourselves than others see.

When Jesus cured Bartimeus, he was acknowledging and teaching the immense value every person has in his sight. It is too bad that we often look at ourselves through the eyes of others, rather than through the eyes of God.

Physical sight comes through our eyes; moral sight comes through our conscience, spiritual sight comes through our faith. We can learn to appreciate the gift of sight by looking at the struggle of the blind.

We can learn to appreciate the gift of moral sight, of conscience, by looking at those who are amoral with no loyalty, no fidelity, no care, - only the isolated, self-absorbed ego, with no responsibility to anyone, and no respect for anything. They live in a small, and frankly, boring world.

And we can learn to appreciate the gift of spiritual sight, the gift of faith, by looking at those whose whole life is defined only by what happens in this world, and by what other people think. They have no larger picture of

which they are a part. If it doesn't happen here, it doesn't happen anywhere. That's a fast track to disappointment and despair.

Therefore, as we hear the story of blind Bartimeus, let us thank God for the gift of sight, and resolve to respect and not endanger these gifts: the gift of physical sight that allows us to see the faces of those we love, and those we are called to love; the gift of moral sight that's called conscience; and the gift of spiritual sight, that's called faith.

They are treasures beyond price!

(Adapted from: Captured Fire, Sunday homilies, Yr B., by S. Joseph Krempa, Society of St. Paul.)