

JESUS CAME TO RECOVER SIGHT TO THE BLIND

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The book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. He opened the book, and found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, Because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim release to the captives, Recovering of sight to the blind…"

Luke 4:17-18a, WEB (emphasis mine)

In his mission statement Jesus announced that he came to preach the gospel to the poor, heal the brokenhearted and proclaim release to the captives. Now he reaches out to the blind, to whom he promises recovery of sight.

Again, it trivializes Scripture to claim that Jesus restored sight only to those sufferers who were physically blind, at some time far into the future, in another place, and only to those individuals somehow earning God's favor. Yes, he did heal the flesh of individual blind persons, but his promise of recovering of sight to the blind goes far beyond that. It reaches into the deepest levels of the human heart to also bring recovery to those suffering from spiritual blindness; to those institutions of society troubled by the blindness of prejudice, racism, sexism, elitism, oppression and so on.

Blindness is not only being able to "see" what one is doing. It has a far deeper effect when it prevents us from perceiving the effects of our actions and behavior. This sort of blindness pervades many prominent institutions of our society, including government, business, the military, and religious entities.

The following statement concerning the inability of oppressors to perceive their guilt is a good example of this type of blindness. " The philosophy of oppression, perfected and refined through civilizations as a true culture of injustice, does not achieve its greatest triumph when its propagandists knowingly inculcate it; rather, the triumph is achieved when this philosophy has become so deeply rooted in the spirits of the oppressors themselves and their ideologues that they are not even aware of their guilt" (a saying posted without attribution on the wall of the Jubilee Center, Managua, Nicaragua).

What it says in effect is that cultures of injustice have refined their techniques of oppression to the point that not even the

oppressors have any awareness of their guilt. This is true institutional blindness. And what of the almost deeper blindness existing when the oppressed do not even know the cause of their oppression, instead blaming themselves or fate for their suffering. Folks, that's what's happening in much of the world.

Can Jesus cure this form of blindness? Yes, provided there is at least some willingness for the sufferers to become aware of their blindness and to seek healing. "There is none so blind as he who will not see," says the old truism. Some do not see because they choose not to. I would include many of the Pharisees and temple authorities of Jesus' day in this group. Instead of promising healing of their blindness to this group, Jesus instead pronounced damnation because of their stubborn refusal to see even when they had Moses and the prophets as their guides.

So not everyone is to be healed of spiritual blindness. Some, like the Pharisees, seem destined to perish in their sins because of their "hard core" of resistance to Christ. They chose their own fate. But there are others of us who are blind, not because of open rebellion against God or hatred of everything associated with Christ, but because we have never been led into newness of spiritual life apart from simple tradition and the rules of our denominations.

Spiritual blindness doesn't go away by itself. The apostle Paul on the road to Damascus needed someone to anoint him before his blindness disappeared. We today also need someone to "anoint" us with the full counsel of God and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. That's an often-neglected function of the clergy.

Paul's letter to the Romans puts it this way: "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, and is rich to all who call on him. For, 'Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.' How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in him whom they have not heard? How will they hear without a preacher? And how will they preach unless they are sent?" (Romans 10:12-15a, WEB).

We need to pray for our church leaders so that they may receive the words of God for the flock. In this day, especially, it's vital that parishioners move beyond spiritual blindness into the vision that only God can provide.