

Homily for the Fourth Sunday of Lent (A)

St. Joseph's Neier

March 29-30, 2014

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Central Idea: We are called to make the effort to see with all of our heart.

My new favorite story.

There was a woman in Italy who had brain damage. (That is not all that wonderful, but just wait.) She suffered a lesion to the parietal lobe of her brain, part of her brain that interprets stimuli from the eye and the optic nerve. The scientists studying her asked her to close her eyes and imagine the piazza of her hometown, the public square with which she would have been familiar. She was asked to visualize standing at one end of the square facing the church and describe the various buildings around her. Because her injury effected that part of her brain that interpreted the left side of her field of vision, she could only describe the buildings in her right field of vision. She could only imagine half of the plaza.

The researches then asked her to imagine walking toward the church and as she visualized approaching the church, she was told, in her mind's eye to turn around and look at the square from the opposite direction. When she did this, all in her mind remember, she could then describe the buildings on the other side.

You may not think that is freaky, but I do.

The ability to see is a gift that we take for granted far too much. It is not just about light and color, shapes and movements entering into eyes, but also about our ability to interpret and make sense out of those stimuli. The two things I have learned about seeing is that it is much more complex than we imagine, and it is much more of an active process than a passive one. The truth is, sometimes we see what we want to see, instead of seeing the truth. They say that seeing is believing; yet our sense of sight is the easiest sense to fool, the easiest sense to manipulate and the easiest sense with which we can fool ourselves.

Our gospel today is the amazing and somewhat aggravating story of the man born blind. Vision and the lack thereof, becomes a metaphor of our willingness (or lack thereof) to see the grace of God. Much like that woman in Italy, many of us have been damaged, and that damage causes us to only see partially, to only see some of the goodness and love of God in our lives. We are the teenager who believes that his or her parents, because they do actually parent, are unreasonably and unfair, keeping them from having a good time. We are the person who believes our society is going to hell in a hand basket and it is (fill in the blank with whomever you want) who is to blame. It is the atheist or the Christian who believes that their rights are being trampled on by the Christian or the atheist. I could go on and on and on, but I think you get the point. We may not have

been born blind, but we are doing a pretty good job of refusing to see. Vision always has been and always will be the problem.

How are we to see the grace of God? How are we to recover our sight?

Three quick things.

**First you have to want to see.** The Pharisees in our story refuse to see the grace of God that was obvious to everyone else. Instead of praising and thanking God for the miracle that took place in their midst, they approach the blind man with skepticism, animosity and more than just a little bit of venom. They seem resentful that the man was cured. That, in essence, is the story of human nature. When things don't fit into our precious little categories and understandings, we cannot see. Recently, I was having a discussion in one of my classes. Typically, I try to help my students see both sides of an issue in the hope that they refuse to accept, one way or the other, simplistic and naïve answers. One of my students wholeheartedly and somewhat crudely dismissed any possible discussion. There was only one right answer, and anyone who thought otherwise is not only wrong, but a sorry excuse for a person. I believe this student is a symbol of the state of discourse in our culture today on all sides of the political divide. (BTW, we came to a peaceful conclusion –unlike our culture.)

**Second, you have to do the work.** The problem in our society is not so much blindness as it is laziness. We cannot even imagine, even if only in our mind's eye, walking out of our way to get a different perspective. This year, probably more than any other year of my whole teaching career, I have been challenged to look at education in a totally different way. It would have been much easier to either blow off any new ideas as wrongheaded (and I did) or just accept what was offered and be a good little educator. Instead what I was called to do was work, and work hard, to figure out what was the right way to go and how was I going to implement this. It is exhausting, but it is worth it. In the human brain, as any computer, visuals take up the most space and the most energy. Seeing is a lot of work.

Finally, just like the woman with the brain lesion had to do in her imagination to see the full piazza, **you have to turn around sometimes to get a fuller picture.** Metanoia, the Greek word for conversion, literally means to turn around. Those who were about to be baptized in the ancient church used to turn to the west, denounce Satan, sin and things that go bump in the night, and then they would physically turn around to the east and profess their faith. Conversion, at its heart, means seeing with new eyes, and part of that is to get a new perspective on things. So often we are satisfied with half the field of vision instead of the whole scene. Lent is our time to resist that urge and to find a new fresh and fuller perspective on our lives.

Right now I would like for you to try to see anew. Close your eyes. Think about that person, that situation, that place which is bothering you or causing you to be blind. Think about where you need to walk to, where do you need to go, to get a new look, a fresh vision of what is happening. Maybe you will have to walk in their shoes a bit. Maybe you will need to see things from their eyes. Find that spot in which you can turn around and see the fuller picture. Try to see the whole piazza.

*Then Jesus said,  
"I came into this world for judgment,  
so that those who do not see might see,"*