

Second Sunday of Lent – Cycle C

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A man is walking his dog – a Chihuahua – on a sticky, 90° day,..He's getting so hot & thirsty, he decides to stop at a tavern to get an ice cold beer....He goes up to the bar & the bartender says, "Hey, fella. You can't bring that dog in here!"...The guy really needs that drink, so he does some fast thinking & says, "But, this is my seeing-eye dog."...The bartender looks at him & sneers: "I don't think so, Mac...They don't have Chihuahuas as seeing-eye dogs."...Without missing a beat, the man cries out: "What?!?! They gave me a Chihuahua?!?" (*I wish I was that quick on my feet*).

I doubt that any of us have ever faked being blind to get something we want, but I suspect that we all have times when we have trouble seeing things clearly, especially when it comes to our perception of others...& what usually happens when our perception of someone is faulty, is that the way we think & feel about them & how we relate to them ends up being so wrong....When this happens, we need a vision correction - & I don't mean a new optical prescription. I mean the kind of vision correction only God can do...A dramatic example of this happens in today's Gospel.

God gives the apostles, Peter, James, & John, a new vision, a clear vision of the REAL Jesus - this man they had followed for 3 yrs, this man they thought they knew...On that mountaintop, they saw Jesus as they'd never seen Him before – transfigured before their eyes...His face as radiant as the sun, His clothing reflecting dazzling white light...They saw Jesus in all His heavenly glory, ...the glory that would soon be His again, once He had endured the suffering & death He had told them about a few days earlier...And when they heard God's voice from out of the cloud, it removed any doubts they may have had about Jesus' identity....This was no ordinary prophet, no run-of-the-mill messiah... He was God's beloved Son...God had given Peter, John. & James a vision correction, ...God had allowed them to see the human Jesus transfigured into the divine Christ who would reign over the whole world.

The vision correction those disciples experienced on that mountaintop profoundly changed their relationship with Jesus. They no longer saw only the surface Jesus. Their perception & understanding went deeper. They saw Jesus differently. They saw the real Jesus....They saw Jesus through God's eyes...I often wonder how different the world would be if we could see beneath the surface, ..see into one another's hearts, see what makes the other guy tick, what makes him do what he does...I'll bet that – in most cases - we would treat each other a whole lot differently, a whole lot better.

Steve Covey who wrote the best seller *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, tells of an experience he had on a New York City subway one Sunday morning...Now if you've ever ridden the New York City subway, you know that it's usually not a very pleasant experience, except maybe for Sunday morning when it is relatively quiet...& that's how it was the morning he describes...Some people were reading newspapers, some were dozing, others just sitting quietly...It was a calm, peaceful scene until a man & his 3 children entered the car...The kids were soon yelling back & forth, throwing things, even grabbing people's newspapers...disturbing everyone...Yet the father just sat there next to Steve, looked down at the floor & did nothing. ...Steve said he was starting to get angry....He couldn't believe the man could be so insensitive as to let his kids run wild & do nothing about it...Finally, he could take it no longer & - with remarkable patience & restraint – he said to the man, "Sir, your children are really bothering a lot of people...Can't you control them a little bit more?"...The man slowly raised his head as if he was regaining consciousness & said, "Oh, you're right...I should do something about it...We just came from the hospital where their mother died an hour ago...I don't know what to do, & I guess they don't know how to handle it either."..

Can U imagine how Steve felt at that moment?...He said he suddenly saw things differently...& because he saw differently, he felt differently. He acted differently...His anger vanished. His heart was moved by this man's pain & he spoke words of compassion: "You're wife just died? I'm so sorry. ...Can you tell me about it? Can I help?"...Now nothing had changed in that subway car; the same people; the same annoying kids; the same disconnected father...What did change was Steve....God had corrected Steve's vision of it all, & it totally changed how he related to that dad & his kids.

I'm sure that Steve remembers them & has kept them in his prayers...But, you know, it doesn't always happen that way...Steve could've gotten off that subway not knowing the truth,... think - -ing the man was an inconsiderate jerk with uncontrollable brats...He would've just chalked it up as a bad experience with someone who doesn't give a damn about anyone else....& instead of having the compassion & prayers of another human being, that man & his children would've had only scorn & contempt...That's what often happens when our judgments & opinions about a person or group are based solely on what we see on the outside...when we don't know or care to know what might be going on inside them...In everything He said & did, in everything He taught & preached, Jesus made it clear that when it comes to judging others, perception isn't always reality, ..You can't judge a book by it's cover...We need to look past the exterior & into the heart. ...& that isn't easy...We need stronger lenses; we need a vision correction that only God can give us.

Author Antoine de St-Exupery wrote a story about his experience as a fighter pilot in the Spanish Civil War. He tells about how he was captured by the enemy one night & thrown into a jail cell. He was sure from the rough treatment & the looks of contempt he received from his captors that he would be executed the next day. Here is how Antoine describes what happened that night: "I was sure I was to be killed. I became terribly nervous & distraught. I fumbled in my pockets to see if there were any cigarettes that had escaped their search. I found one, & because of my shaking hands I could barely get it to my lips. But I had no matches; they had taken those. I looked through the bars of my cell at my jailer. He would not make eye contact with me. After all, one does not make eye contact with a thing, a corpse. I called to him, 'Have you got a light,..por favor?' He looked at me & shrugged & finally came over to light my cigarette."

"As he came close & held the match to my cigarette, his eyes couldn't help but lock with mine. At that moment, for some reason, I smiled.... I don't know why; perhaps out of nervousness, or perhaps because we were so close to each other. In any case, I smiled....In that instant, it was as though a spark jumped across the gap between our two hearts, our two human souls.... I know he didn't want to, but as he lit my cigarette, & looked directly into my eyes, a faint smile formed on his face....And his looking at me seemed to take on a new dimension. 'Do you have kids?' he asked... 'Yes, here, here.' I answered. I took out my wallet & nervously fumbled for the pictures of my family... He took out the pictures of his *nino* - his children - & began to talk about his plans & hopes for them... My eyes filled with tears, & I said that I feared that I'd never see my family again, never have the chance to see them grow up...Tears came to his eyes too.... Then suddenly, without another word, he unlocked my cell & silently led me out - out of the jail, quietly & by back roads, out of the town. There, at the edge of town, he let me go, & saying nothing, he turned & walked back toward the jail."

When that jailer first looked at Antoine, he saw the enemy...It was a time of war; this man was his prisoner & he had been commanded to guard him...It was his duty to obey his superiors. ...But then something happened...That jailer got a glimpse into the depths of Antoine's heart – into his very soul...& he saw Antoine as more than his enemy & prisoner... It was as if he was saying to Antoine, "Maybe you are my enemy;...maybe you deserve only my contempt;...maybe I should have nothing to do with you, ...but I can look into your eyes & I can see past all those things that divide us... I can see past my anger & hatred, past my pride & my

prejudice....I can see past all that garbage & into your heart....& there I find a beloved child of God,...God's wonderful creation. ...with hopes & dreams,....needs & desires that are really not much different than mine."...And with this change in vision, came a change in how the jailer treated his prisoner.

My friends, like Peter, John & James, & Steve Covey & Antoine's jailer, there will be times when the Lord will give us a glimpse into another person's heart to see them as He sees them...But that can only happen if we are willing to let the Lord open our eyes, clear up our vision...It can only happen if we can let go of all our prejudices & wrong assumptions & hatred & fear...that fog up our vision...As we continue our Lenten journey, let this be our prayer: Lord, give me eyes like yours...Give me a heart like yours...so that I may see others & love others as you do. ...AMEN.