

The grace, mercy, and peace of Christ Jesus rest upon each and every one of you this day.

I love the ironic message of the Gospel lesson. Out of everyone in the story; everyone lining that road—disciples included—the blind man is the only one who truly recognizes Jesus for who He really is—the promised Son of David, the Messiah in the flesh. Nobody else, including the apostles, saw Jesus the way the faithful blind guy saw Jesus; seeing Him with a faith that could only come about through hearing; hearing the Word of Christ. Once again, you can't help but hear the words of our heavenly Father, which He spoke at the Transfiguration: "This is My beloved Son. Listen to Him." It really is that simple: The blind guy "saw" Jesus so clearly because he listened to Jesus. And then there's our OT lesson. God makes it very clear in our OT lesson that He doesn't see things the way man sees things. Man looks at the outer shell, but God sees the heart. We see this in spades with little runt David being chosen as Israel's king over the much better choices that were his older brothers. God doesn't see things the way man sees things. Not exactly a deep mystery that needs explaining, is it?

Here's the thing: We could easily turn this into a sermon on how we are guilty of all the very things these lessons teach against. We could have a month of sermons on the OT text alone; on how God doesn't see things the way man sees things. We could have a month of sermons on how God sees the heart, but we instead look to outer things to determine if a person is good and faithful or not, or if God is pleased or not. We even do this with the reflection in the mirror. If things are going good, then God must be happy. If things aren't shaking out the way we like, then God must be upset with us. We do judge based on what we see. We do judge based on worldly benchmarks and worldly definitions of success/failure. You may not like to admit this, but it's true. We're all guilty of doing it.

Do you notice something though? All of this puts the focus on us. It puts the focus on how we see (or fail to see) things. Consequently, what naturally follows from such a man-centered focus is a man-centered message that gets focused on what we need to do or not do in order to remedy this problem. We wind up hearing what we want to hear; i.e., how we need to be more like the blind man and see better. We wind up hearing how we need to not look at outer things, but instead see things the way God sees things; that is; to look at the heart and see the heart.

Do you realize how foolish that is! You can't make yourself "unblind," no matter how hard you try. You can't see the heart! That's the whole point! You can't even see your own heart properly, let alone anyone else's heart. Your own heart can fool you. Remember: "Out of the heart comes evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, and slander," ...except, of course, if it's coming out of our heart, and especially if it's coming out of our heart with the very best intentions. Then it's different. But God knows our hearts, right? Yeah...I'd say that God knows your heart better than you do.

But I digress...all this talk misses the point. God is the One who gives the gift of faith to the blind man so that he can so clearly see and know Jesus even when everybody else doesn't. God is the One who sees the heart. God is the One who doesn't see things the way man sees things. We get so busy looking to ourselves and our works and our hearts that we wind up taking our focus off of God. We get so busy looking at ourselves (or worse yet, other people) that we wind up not looking to God.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: Behold! (Listen and you will see.) The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! Here is God's promise of redemption, in the flesh. Here is God's wrath

against your sin, my sin, and all sin...in the flesh. Here is your victory, your peace, and your salvation, beaten, bloodied, and nailed to a tree to die. Here is perfect obedience, perfect humility, and perfect love. How can we be so sure? Easy: Because Jesus says so. Here is where faith focuses! Nowhere else! Here, and here alone, is our redemption. Here is the Son of God, the very same Son of God we are to listen to, lifted up and exalted for all the world to see and to know just how much God hates sin and yet loves sinners. "It is finished!" Here is where we hear victory, even though our Old Adam senses, with the rest of the world, see nothing but death and defeat. Here is where the faith that comes through hearing Christ rejoices. It is finished!

Here is Christus Victor, in your very presence, holding out to you His free and unmerited gifts of grace, mercy, and peace. I know they don't look like much. To the rest of the world, some Christians included, these are nothing more than empty symbols. That's all they see. But faith knows different. Faith sees different. Faith sees different because faith hears and believes what Christ has already said about such things. "Baptism saves you. You have been baptized into My death and My resurrection. Take and eat; take and drink, this is My body and My blood, given and shed for you; for the forgiveness of all your sin. As often as you do this, remember what I have said. I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

This is our blessed assurance and joyous peace this very day. This is our Christ-centered reality, right here and right now. May God, through the working of His Holy Spirit in these, His means of grace, open your ears, your hearts, and your minds so that your eyes of faith may not only see, but actively seek Christ and His victorious peace right where He tells you to look; right where He promises to be, now and to the end of the age. To Him alone be all glory, all praise, and all honor.
AMEN