

Along the track

How is Your Eyesight?

We can see a lot by just looking. Or very little at all. I was wandering around in a famous art gallery some years ago and one of the guides was speaking about one of the great art works to a small group of onlookers. I had just taken some time to look at that particular painting so I stayed to listen. It was incredible. She revealed features I had not noticed, details I had overlooked, colours I had missed. But that's life – we rush past, glance at things, just a quick look. Sometimes we need help just to see.

St Paul lost his sight at the time of his conversion. It is described in very dramatic terms:

As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

The men travelling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. (Acts 9)

Even though his eyes were wide open he could not see anything! The men travelling with him heard but did not see. What is that trying to tell us? Sometimes our eyes can be wide open too, and we don't see.

What we see also depends on what kind of eyes we are using. Sometimes we accuse people of looking at the world through 'rose-coloured' glasses, meaning that they see the world in a perhaps overly cheerful, optimistic, or favourable way. Not a bad way to look at things but it does illustrate that things are coloured by the way we look at them. A person looking at a situation from the perspective of one who is prejudiced against another may interpret a situation quite differently from one who doesn't. A person looking with the eyes of faith sees things differently from one who doesn't – he or she sees other dimensions, other layers of meaning. Is one wrong and the other right? No, but one has a perhaps richer view of reality. If we look through eyes that are jaded, cynical, jealous, or bitter, we will not see or understand clearly.

St Gregory of Nyssa who lived around the end of the fourth century described the difference between heaven and hell in a rather novel way. Picture yourself, he said, walking out on a bright, sunny day with healthy eyes. You will experience the sunlight as something wonderful, pleasant and beneficial. Now picture yourself walking out on exactly the same bright sunny day, but with a diseased eye. Now you will experience the sunlight as something terrible, painful, awful – an ordeal, something to shy away from. You may even cover up your eyes. God has not changed, it is rather how we perceive God, God's world, and even each other.

So are our eyes healthy or 'dis-eased'? Dis-eased eyes look around at the world with an air of dissatisfaction and jealousy, wanting to possess what others have. Many of us get caught up comparing ourselves with others. Such vision makes us always look for more. We are not at ease. We are also looking with dis-eased eyes if we are angry, bitter or resentful. We don't like to admit to that but nobody holding a grudge sees straight. Our vision is dis-eased when we feel we are better than others because they are wrong and we are right. Prejudice destroys vision.

Or do we consciously look around with the eyes of wonder and amazement at the beauty of the world we live in, even in those things that are very familiar to us? Surely we can't be too busy to take a minute to do that. Do we look at others with gratitude for who they are? And if we have become a bit jaded, grumpy and taking things (and others) for granted, do we look for ways to revitalise the way we see them and our 'world'. Our eyesight is clear when we delight in the good fortune of others, when we are open to genuinely admire the achievements of others and especially when we are ready to forgive and forget. Really forget!

Our eyes are clear when we are grateful even for the smallest things, the things that are so familiar that we often take them for granted. Gratitude not only restores sight and goes one step further. It enables insight. If we think about it, the most grateful person we know has the best eyesight of all the people we know.

Regards
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