

3rd Sunday of Ordinary Time “Partners in the Gospel and Spiritual Vision”

St. Thomas Aquinas, Camas

Bishop Frank Schuster

Three years ago, the archbishop hosted a convocation in Tacoma which turned into one of the largest assemblies of lay ecclesial ministers, parish leadership, priests, and deacons in the history of the archdiocese. The focus of the day was a new initiative, called “Partners in the Gospel”. With shifting demographics and pastoral needs in the Pacific Northwest, Partners in the Gospel calls us to re-envision what ministry should look like the Archdiocese of Seattle so we can get back to the mission Jesus gave us to make disciples of all nations. Three years later, that discernment of what that looks like, what that vision will be, continues in every parish family. However, the process of “re-envisioning” can’t be done with butcher paper and markers. It is a process that must begin on our knees before the Blessed Sacrament. This is because what we want is Jesus’ vision for our archdiocese and parish families, not what our egos want. Spiritual vision matters.

One of Bishop Barron’s earlier books was the book “And Now I See”. In it he offers a beautiful theology of vision. Bishop Barron starts off with the argument that Christianity is first and foremost a way of seeing. Christians see differently, and if we are living the faith, people see us differently. It is why people can walk into our parishioners’ homes and know just by looking at the walls how they view the world, what is of ultimate importance to them, like pictures of their family and friends with maybe a crucifix or an icon of our Lady someplace close by. We carry our different vision with us from sacred places into the world. Ora et labora, our works flow from our prayer, our relationship with our Lord, into the world. We do our little part, St. Therese of Lisieux little way, or as Saint Teresa of Calcutta said, doing little things with great love. Through us, God transforms the world in which we live into the vision we carry within us, the Kingdom of God.

Bishop Barron writes, “What unites figures as diverse as James Joyce, Caravaggio, John Milton, the architect of Chartres, Dorothy Day, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and the later Bob Dylan is a peculiar and distinctive take on things, a style, a way, (a vision) which flow finally from Jesus of Nazareth.” He continues by pointing to some great theologians in our tradition, he says, “Origen of Alexandria once remarked that holiness is seeing with the eyes of Christ, Telhard de Chardin says, with great passion, that his mission as a Christian thinker was to help people to *see*, and Thomas Aquinas, whose feast day we celebrate this weekend, said that the ultimate goal of the Christian life is a ‘beatific vision’, an act of seeing.”

What keeps us from “seeing” the vision God wants for us personally, for our communities and for our world? The short answer is sin. Sin clouds our vision, as we can see in our second reading from St. Paul. St. Paul is frustrated with the Corinthians’ spiritual vision. You see, the Church of Christ in Corinth was separated into competing

factions, one calling themselves the church of Kephas, another the church of Paul, etc. Paul's response to the Corinthians is, "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" For St. Paul, ministry was not about "Paul" but about Jesus Christ! Sin, division, pride, and entitlement clouded the Corinthians' spiritual vision. And, I dare say, this same kind of division can happen today between different parishes within a parish family. Not here, right? I hear things are going well. Keep the faith.

However, when confronted with the factionalism of the Corinthian church, Paul's answer to their dysfunction later in his letter is Jesus' real presence in the Holy Eucharist. We see this clearly in first Corinthians chapter 11, a chapter devoted to the Last Supper and a reminder to take the reception of Holy Communion seriously. However, St. Paul doesn't stop there. For St. Paul, receiving Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament is not meant to just transform ourselves as individuals. In the very next chapter, 1 Corinthians 12, St. Paul challenges them that the experience of Holy Communion is also meant to transform the entire community into one body of Christ. They are a community comprised of many parts and yet called to become one body in Christ, and so are we. However, St. Paul isn't finished yet. What does one body of Christ look like? Well, onto the next chapter, 1 Corinthians 13. A body of Christ should look like a people who, in fact, love each other! He argues that when everything else is stripped away, only faith, hope, and love remain, but the greatest of these is love.

My friends, when were those times when we struggled with faith, hope, and love? When were those times that you felt the most spiritually blind? How does the journey towards spiritual vision begin? The journey begins with the message Jesus launched his ministry, "Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand". If the problem is sin, the answer is repentance. However, the word "repent" in Greek carries a much richer meaning. The Greek word for repent is "Metanoia". "Meta" means "to elevate" or "transcend", and "Nous" means one's "mind"? And so, metanoia more literally means to transcend your mind.

I think what Jesus is saying when he uses this word, metanoia, is "Everything you know is wrong", "Transcend your thinking", stop looking at the world as other humans do, transcend your mind, embrace a new vision, a vision of the Kingdom of God, at hand, right now in your homes, in the streets, and at work. Don't look just with your eyes, look at the world through God's eyes, and see if the world doesn't seem now to be brighter, more beautiful, and see if your moral life starts to change for the better as a result. My friends, brass tacks, what would happen if we saw ourselves and the world around us with Jesus' eyes? Would we look at our family members differently if we saw them with Jesus' eyes? Would we look at our priests, maybe even bishops differently if we saw them with Jesus' eyes? How about the unborn? How about the immigrant? My friends, would you look at the person you see in the mirror differently if you saw yourself with Jesus' eyes?

You see, when we look at the mirror each morning, we can be so judgmental of what we see, and we can be so myopic about how God sees our lives and the people in our lives. We can live so long like that, that we can simply think our blindness is normal. What if you looked inside your heart and saw the beauty that God sees? It would be transformative. My friends, as Partners in the Gospel continues to unfold as our archdiocese and parish families reenvision what ministry will look like, the most important work we need to do begins on our knees. What does Jesus envision for you? What does Jesus envision for me? What does Jesus envision for the archdiocese and for the world? St. Thomas Aquinas would argue the Beatific Vision, nothing less than the salvation of souls.