

May our eyes be open to the incredible blessings of the Father’s mercy, as they are poured out on us as we journey through life, in Christ. Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ: Today marks the end of a church season and the start of a new one. We leave behind the manger, and the basic ministry of Jesus – and with the ashes of Wednesday, we start a journey towards the inevitable crucifixion of God. In Lent, the setting of our liturgy becomes more meditative, as we contemplate the sufferings of Christ – the sufferings he endured for us. We could focus on the desperate state of mankind, that required Jesus to leave heaven behind...but this year, I think we need to realize the message some blind people learned in today’s Gospel reading from Luke. That Jesus came to heal us, to open our eyes, to help us to see. That was His mission – that was His journey, a Journey of Mercy...Who is really blind? The disciples regarding the prophecy? The man besides the road?

I cannot believe it is simply a coincidence that Luke would write the paragraph that begins Lent, and follow that up with a story about blindness being healed. As Jesus tells them of what awaits them in Jerusalem, the disciples are even more blind than the man on the side of the road.

“³⁴But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said.”

To make a point, in those days, you repeated the thought, but using different words. It’s called parallelism, and it probably still is a very effective way of communicating. Two times puts emphasis on the point. Three times...drives it home. “³⁴But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said.”

In front of them, this journey towards the torture and death which Jesus proclaimed clearly, yet they were blind – more blind than the man who couldn’t see.

Perhaps it was the joy of the moment, after all, they were walking with Jesus! They saw miracles, they heard the great teaching, they were fed, along with thousands. Things were good, even if the ministry was pretty simple as they travelled from town to town. If they knew, would they have abandoned Jesus? Would they have tried to stop Him? Perhaps it was good that they were blinded? Oh yeah, they were blinded. What downside could there be to the ministry, walking along with the one they knew was the side of God?

I think, that we today get in the same kind of pattern as the disciples. Ministry may not always be perfect, church may be challenged, but we realize we walk with God, and all will be set right. We like the cross, because it shows us the hope of the future. But we struggle with crucifixes, those cross still picturing Christ nailed to it, tormented by the pain and agony. We would far prefer to forget what happened there. We would also like to forget why he hung there: Idolatry, rejecting authority, murder and hatred, lust, gossip and slander, envy and jealousy...

As the disciples are walking towards the cross, blinded to the events that await them in Jerusalem, and the meaning of those events, they come across a man, though blind, sees far better than they. You see, once the crowd tells the poor blind man, who was seeking help, any help, who was coming and causing such a stir, there was no way that Jesus would not hear his cries. So many Sabbaths, when the Old Testament prophets were read in the synagogue, the man would hear the promises about the Messiah. Promises like the one in Isaiah’s reading today, where sight would be given to the blind, among all the healings, among all the things restored.

Even though blind to light, the man realized that his only hope was if this Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah. And using a messianic title, the man cries out with a desperation – Son of David – have mercy on me...

Son of David....have mercy on me..How could Jesus not, as He journeyed the journey to show ultimate mercy, not stop and fulfill the prophecies? The very compassion that drove Him to the cross, drives him to help this man see... but not just see...The Greek word that is translated into “recover my sight” is that incredible word that means to see and perceive and know. The word that describes when Jesus looked at Peter after Peter betrayed Him three times. The word for the intuition, the compassion, the understanding. The healing was far more than just physical – it touched every aspect of this blind man.

This man trusted in God’s promise of a Messiah, and what the Messiah would do – and it was done, far more than he could have ever imagined. He saw a hope in the Messiah, not just for the present situation, but to change his life completely..

It was an act of compassion, and act of love, an act of mercy...The Mercy to be delivered

It is lost in modern translations, but some of you may have learned the third reading today in the King James Version. We love it because it sounds so beautiful and wise. But does anyone remember what word was used in the old KJV instead of love?

Yes... Charity... hear it again.. the old way...

Though I speak °with the tongues of men and of angels, °and have not °charity, I am °become as sounding brass, or a °tinkling cymbal. 2 And °though I have °the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge°; and °though I have all faith, so °that I could remove mountains,

°and have not °charity, I am nothing. 3 °And though I °bestow all °my goods to feed the poor, and °though I °give my body to be burned, °and have not °charity, °it profiteth me nothing. 4 °Charity suffereth long, and is °kind; °charity envieth not°; °charity vaunteth not itself, is not °puffed up, 5 °Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not °her own°, is not °easily provoked, thinketh no evil; 6 °Rejoiceth not °in iniquity, but °rejoiceth in the truth°; 7 °Beareth all things, °believeth all things, °hopeth all things, °endureth all things. 8 °Charity never °faileth!

In both Greek and Hebrew, the words ἀγάπη (agape) and (תּוֹנָה) chesed, one of the words for love, is also translated as mercy. Or in this case, Charity...I think, such a word is actually more important in a marriage, and in any relationship. It is the basis of our relationship with God – this sense of mercy/love/charity. To truly love, is to be charitable towards the one you care for – it is to be quick to care. This mercy is characterized by Jesus completely in the healing of the blind man, and made even more clear, as he journeyed to accomplish what the prophets proclaimed – that he would be handed over to be mocked, and mistreated and spit upon and whipped. For our good, He was sacrificed, killed by Roman centurions with the Jewish priests inciting a near riot to call for his death. A death that He embraced, even as He set His face on the last leg of the journey to the city.

For it would profit us nothing, were Christ to not demonstrate and prove His love, His Charity, His Mercy, as He endured and suffered. In doing so, He healed us, He restored our sight. He completed His journey of mercy, and recovered for us, our ability to see God, to know His love, His charity, His mercy. Understanding it, realizing its revealed, and able to begin to grasp the depth, the width, the breadth, and the height of God’s love, charity and mercy, we find ourselves at peace. Not just the peace of the world, but the incredible,

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unsurpassable, peace of God our Father, the peace which keeps our hearts and minds in Christ. Amen.