

AN EYE-OPENING EXPERIENCE

(The 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time: Cycle B)

What does it mean to have your eyes opened? We all know what an eye-opening experience is. That's one of those moments in life when we're just going right along, doing what we do, and then something that we did not expect, something that we did not see coming happens. And, at least for the moment, we have a revelation. We see or think about things differently. Sometimes these moments are big, sometimes little; sometimes sad or very frightening, but sometimes simple and lighthearted. Either way, this is a moment in which God offers us the opportunity to open our eyes a little more widely to something or someone or open our eyes to something about life that we had not seen at all.

For me, it goes without saying, that my illness and recovery from it opened my eyes to a lot: it opened my eyes to some things about myself, to life, to certain other people, and even to God. Across the board, the experience opened my eyes to things that I needed to see. But here's the thing about these kinds of experiences: it's not just about whether or not our eyes are opened *in the moment*. It's also about *how long our eyes stay opened*.

I still spend a good deal of time each month at my alma mater in Baton Rouge, Catholic High School. A few weeks ago, one of our seniors, a young man by the name of Michael Gomes, was killed in an automobile accident. I didn't know Michael that well, but I do know some of his closest friends fairly well. The newscasts kept reporting that it was speculated that alcohol was involved. I'm not totally sure what happened exactly, but I am sure of one thing without a doubt. This experience affected the entire school community, whether you knew Michael well or not. Three of his friends, the ones with whom he would sit for lunch everyday, invited me to sit with them for lunch on the day of his memorial service. We didn't talk about *IT*, but you could tell. It was there, on everyone's minds. This event had rocked them and hurt them. A few days later, another student shared the following thoughts with me about what had happened: *I didn't know Michael, really. But the experience of his death has opened my eyes. I just hope that they stay open.*

So, you see, it's not just about whether or not our eyes are opened in the moment itself but whether or not they stay opened. In the Gospel today,

Jesus opens someone's eyes, literally and physically. Bartimaeus says to Jesus, *have pity on me, Lord*. Jesus responds by asking, *what is it you would have me do for you?* And the man, who could have asked for anything, simply says, *I just want to see*. And we know how the rest of the story goes. But here's the interesting thing: we don't know what that man was like *the next day*. We don't know what he was like, what he was saying to others, how he was acting. In the moment, Mark tells us he got up immediately and began to follow Jesus down the road. But what about the next day, when maybe things had worn off? What about the next morning when he had to get up and go to work to a job that perhaps he didn't like? When he had to get up and go to school? What about the next time somebody he didn't like crossed his path? Or the next disappointment in life came his way? Were his eyes still opened? We don't really know, do we.

If God speaks to us and offers us a new kind of vision through an experience in which our eyes are opened, it's not just about whether or not we recognize God in the moment. It's about whether or not we remember, as time passes.

So, if you're sitting here today and thinking back to a time in your life when God brought you through something difficult or opened your eyes to someone or some thing in a new way and wondering how you could ever pay God back, know this: We have no debt to pay. Jesus Christ paid it once, for all of us. All God asks is that we use the gift of that moment for the good of others and for this world in which we live, that we would be a person who remembers and not one who forgets.