

The Sick Eye

25 January 2004

Mt 6:22-23 "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is not sound, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!"

How we perceive the world is directly connected to our spiritual condition. What is happening within us affects how we view other people and circumstances. We can see this when we lack sleep or are sick, and suddenly things that didn't bother us before become nagging annoyances. The things around us did not change, only our perception of them.

So, our perception is never completely accurate, and even less reliable. It must constantly be tested and recalibrated so that we can see the world with greater clarity. If the 'eye' of perception is left untreated, it will continue to fill us with darkness, simply because it can't see the Light.

The healing of the eye of perception is an intensive process. It takes years to remove the emotional and mental baggage we carry around that clog our eyes. This involves confession, penitent activities and even, in some cases, therapy. We must then amend our manner of living so that we do not return to old habits which led to our blindness to begin with.

A simple way to test your vision is to begin to notice how you feel about others. Spend a week noticing your feelings. Are you angry? Frustrated? Disappointed? Afraid? Perhaps you can take this a bit further: when I feel these negative feelings about another, what does it make me? Smarter? Better? More _____?

The Fathers teach us that the way we feel about others is a good indication of how we feel about ourselves, and ultimately our disposition with God. The person who is constantly judging others often is an unfair critic, mostly of him- or herself. And, what this person dreads more than anything is that God will also do the same thing to him or her. In psychology, when we take our feelings and put them on another, it is called 'transference.' In the Church, we call it spiritual blindness, because the ultimate result is that we do not see things as they are.

If we deprive the eye of vision, the mind will create images. This is both the blessing and curse of the imagination, since the mind is so adept that it can create an entire world of thoughts and opinions based on absolutely nothing other than the turmoil and passions at work inside. Even our long-term friendships and family relations can be totally delusional, simply because our blindness has kept us from noticing the changes in others.

This means that the sicker we become, the less likely we will be challenged enough by others to notice how sick we really are. Spiritual blindness is a very real malady, as real as any form of mental illness, and perhaps worse. After all, many mental illnesses respond well to medication. There is no pill for a person filled with rage and hate.

Being genuinely cut off from others (i.e. unable to get beyond our web of delusions), we may think well of ourselves and feel perfectly comfortable with our identity and self-knowledge. The holy ascetics of our Church merely wag their heads at our self-aggrandizement. Long ago they learned that such high opinions of one's self, as well as utter abasement to the point of self-hatred and despair, lead to spiritual suicide. The most egregious wounds to our souls go untreated just because we deny the injury. It will only be a matter of time before infection and death set in.

If we carefully, with the help of spiritual guidance, begin to take account of our relationships, we may begin to see where our blindness has caused us great misery and sorrow. We have left others broken and bleeding because we would *rather cause another person pain than experience our own*. This is the worst form of blindness, since it purposely intends a harmful action to others for selfish reasons.

Let's not fool ourselves: spiritual blindness harms all of the people around us. We know others who's self-trickery has harmed us and those who love them. Now, we know what we do to others. 'Not me!' you say. Are you sure? Do you want to make a bet on it? Would you wager your life?

Our sins come from self-delusion. After all, if we could see things perfectly, as God does, then sin would not be an option. We would see it in all its futility and stupidity.

The healthy eye sees a world filled with God's love. It sees beautiful people created in God's Image and Likeness, and has compassions for the burdens they carry. It quickly grants forgiveness and seeks mercy rather than judgment.

The healthy eye sees things as they really are, and sees the Heavenly Kingdom in the midst of fallenness.