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8 Ordinary Time C
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St. James Catholic Church, KCMO

The first pair of eyeglasses was made in 1286. The first optometric shop in the U.S. opened in 1783. A year later, Benjamin Franklin invented bifocals. The first eye chart was made in 1862. The first contact lens was made in 1887, though the soft contact lens wasn't made for almost another hundred years. The first college courses in optometry were in 1819. It's just in the last 1/4 of the church's history that correcting our literal vision has been in existence. The overly rational explaining away of biblical possessions and visions is the astigmatism or needing corrected vision of those who saw things. Even braille as a printed language for the blind is just over 200 years old.

The Gospel today juxtaposes our vision - how we see the world around us and the vision of others - a juxtaposition of vision and fruits as the products of our moral lives. A good person, out of the roots of goodness within herself, produces good in the world. It's a little odd from Jesus, not because of the idea of what is inside of us brings life to what we do in the moral life, but it's a little bit odd from Jesus who said to the crowds, "If you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will God give the Holy Spirit to those who ask."

What we see shapes what we do, and what we do shapes how we see the world around us, and maybe more importantly, what we do shapes how we see ourselves.

The difficulty of our vision - in the time of Jesus, centuries later or even today, the difficulty of our vision is not our near-sightedness or far-sightedness or if we have progressed to trifocals in our glasses, the

difficulty of our vision is what we don't see - either because we can't see it or because we choose to ignore it.

Years ago, a pastor of a parish was asked by parishioners to renovate their church to make the church more accessible, particularly the sanctuary so that parishioners who were in wheelchairs or on walkers could lector or distribute communion. He refused. A few months later, he was in a terrible car accident that left him in a wheelchair. He wasn't able to enter the sanctuary of the church for the rest of his tenure as pastor because the church hadn't been renovated to have an accessible sanctuary. There is a combination of inability to see and the choice not to see issues of accessibility, both inside the church and outside the walls of the church - like the army of snowplowing trucks on our streets while sidewalks go unplowed or unshoveled, pushing pedestrians into the street even just to get to work.

The difficulty of our vision is what we don't see and what we choose not to see. There are wooden beams we're able to remove, and there are wooden beams in our eyes we don't see yet.

A few weeks ago, half of what I preached on was the inclusion of the dignity and humanity of trans folks in the church and in our society. I had thought that would be the preaching that got me reported to my provincial and to the diocese, not the homily on the beatitudes. My personal understanding is not a prerequisite for someone's humanity, I quoted from a TikTok.

One hazard of younger clergy is where they get their source material from these days.¹

But to frame that I suggested that the dignity and humanity of outsiders or people left out by much of what we do is foundational to our identity and our actions as Christians. Who we are as Christians is shaped, both wholly shaped and holy shaped, by what we do at a table. The common measurements of a table might be the diameter or length or width of its sides, but a better measurement of any table - based on what is done at the table - the better measurement of any table is by who is left out or who is missing from the table. In a sense, the seat for Elijah is both for Elijah and for everyone who is left out in any way. Vatican 2 changed what we do because of the table, both in the literal sense of offering the cup to people for the first time in centuries and in the deliberations and discussions of the church's relationship with various groups, suddenly with those folks in the room. When *Nostra Aetate* was discussed and voted on, Jewish representatives were present at Vatican 2; likewise with Protestant delegates in discussing the church's relationship to other Christians. The measurement of our tables is best mapped out by who is left out or

excluded in what we do. It's that reflection and perspective - who is left out or excluded - that helps us best to figure out what we can't see or what we are choosing to avoid seeing, the wooden beams in our eyes. The lens to help us figure out what we're not seeing or what we're keeping ourselves from seeing is paying attention to the things we do - around the table, around the font, around the parking lot in the after-meeting meeting, - paying attention to the things that we do and those not present or included in those actions.

The words and actions of Pope Francis have invited all of us throughout the world to look to those excluded in our church and our societies. Nearly 5 years ago this month, Pope Francis shared, what I think has been the only *Urbi et Orbi* statement outside of Easter or Christmas in my lifetime. Towards the end of his address, in an empty St. Peter's Square, vast enough it felt like it could hold the entire world as we stepped into lockdowns and social distancing for the first time in most of our lives, Pope Francis said this:

"The Lord asks us and, in the midst of our tempest, invites us to reawaken and put into

¹ The original quote was from user "britt_or_britton" on TikTok. The full quote is: "Trans people exist. They are human beings. They deserve respect, they deserve compassion, empathy, love, happiness. They deserve to take up space. They deserve safety. They deserve comfort. They deserve every right that may be afforded to anyone else. Your personal understanding is not a prerequisite for their humanity. They exist, they're here, they've always been here, they will always be here. They deserve love; they deserve protection. They deserve to be stood up for. They deserve to be seen, and acknowledged, and heard. It's very difficult

to figure out how to explain to other people that just don't get it, how to care more. How do you explain to someone how to care more, how to have empathy. You don't need science to explain something or to rationalize something that exists, that's saying, 'I'm here, I'm right behind you.' You're like, 'Where are the numbers? Where are the stats?' You don't need those, you don't need the stats when those people are living, breathing humans, living one of the hardest, bravest existences possible. Ok. Stand up for people; love people."

practice that solidarity and hope capable of giving strength, support and meaning to these hours when everything seems to be floundering. The Lord awakens so as to reawaken and revive our Easter faith.

embrace hope: that is the strength of faith, which frees us from fear and gives us hope.”²

We have an anchor: by his cross we have been saved. We have a rudder: by his cross we have been redeemed. We have a hope: by his cross we have been healed and embraced so that nothing and no one can separate us from his redeeming love.

In the midst of isolation when we are suffering from a lack of tenderness and chances to meet up, and we experience the loss of so many things, let us once again listen to the proclamation that saves us: he is risen and is living by our side. The Lord asks us from his cross to rediscover the life that awaits us, to look towards those who look to us, to strengthen, recognize and foster the grace that lives within us. Let us not quench the wavering flame (cf. Is 42:3) that never falters, and let us allow hope to be rekindled.

Embracing his cross means finding the courage to embrace all the hardships of the present time, abandoning for a moment our eagerness for power and possessions in order to make room for the creativity that only the Spirit is capable of inspiring. It means finding the courage to create spaces where everyone can recognize that they are called, and to allow new forms of hospitality, fraternity and solidarity. By his cross we have been saved in order to embrace hope and let it strengthen and sustain all measures and all possible avenues for helping us protect ourselves and others. Embracing the Lord in order to

² Pope Francis, “Extraordinary Moment of Prayer,” Urbi et Orbi, March 27, 2020, Sagrato of St. Peter’s Basilica.