

Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see: for I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.

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We might think that these words of Christ are only for those who sat at Jesus' feet long ago. But Fr. Melville Scott, a 19th century English priest, writes,

This is the blessedness of the Church of Christ and of each Christian, that he sees the love of God. Behind him he sees the Cross, the final revelation of the love of God to the world. He sees, but a few years back, a little procession, the chief figure in it a woman bearing in her arms an infant, and he knows that infant to have been himself, then brought individually to the Cross for pardon. In his very sight he sees a Table, and on that Table God's best gift of love. Here is the Altar of his acceptance and the Table of his sustenance. Blessed are the eyes that see this sight which brings the Cross into the life of the present and assures of every blessing. In front of him he sees a hope of quiet rest, when service is done, in the Paradise of God. And on a certain morning blessed will be his ears, for they shall hear the voice of the Son of God. Thus blessed are the eyes that see in Jesus the pardon of sins past, the pledge of present grace, and the hope of future glory.

Fr. Scott puts it all into perspective for us. *Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see* applies to us as well. We who have been made members of Christ's Church, who have the assurance of the forgiveness of our sins, must remember that with this blessing comes the responsibility of living it out in our own lives, of claiming it for ourselves. As Jesus has said elsewhere, *to whom much is given, much is required*. And what is required of us? Put simply, what is required of us is that we *Love the Lord [our] God with all [our] heart, and with all [our] soul, and with all [our] mind...and [our] neighbor as [ourselves]*. *On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets*. All the Laws of the Old Testament, and all the words of the prophets are boiled down to these two commandments.

But as with everything that is familiar, we often have our own definitions of what it means to *love thy neighbor as thyself*. For some, like the lawyer, *love thy neighbor as thyself*, means *love thy neighbor as is thy duty*. We, like the lawyer, have our own requirements for what it means to *be a neighbor*, and what *loving him as thyself* means. We might also wonder if we can truly love our neighbor if it is a commandment. How can love be a law? How can God command us to love

Him? This is what the lawyer in the Gospel wants to know too. And so, after he asks Jesus which is the greatest of the laws, and Jesus makes him answer his own question, he asks Jesus who his neighbor is. *And who is my neighbor?* And again, Jesus humbles him by answering in a parable that reveals that the lawyer has asked the wrong question. The question is not who is my neighbor, but how should a neighbor act? The lawyer knows that he must be a man of charity, but how much charity does he have to show?

Jesus answers him through a parable which challenges our ideas of charity towards our neighbor. Jesus teaches us that love of neighbor should not be calculated and restrained, as though one were merely doing one's duty; but should be done, one might say, in a foolishly extravagant and lavish way. Here is a constant note in Jesus' teaching and probably the most characteristic. One hears it again and again in the Sermon on the Mount, where we are told to love our enemies, to go the second mile, to give our cloak, too. Many of the parables reveal it, as when the employer pays all his laborers the full wage, though some have worked only for an hour, and a father rewards with gifts and a great feast the prodigal son who returns. And here again we find the hallmark of Jesus: the fact that the neighbor was so completely a stranger, being of all things *a Good Samaritan*, someone who hated the Jews as much as the Jews hated and despised him, who in the eyes of the Jews knew only a corrupted and heretical version of Judaism. Those listening to Jesus probably expected *the Samaritan* to have further robbed the man and finished him off. And yet somehow, this *Samaritan* is so good hearted that he shows extravagance in his compassion. *He binds up the man's wounds himself, pouring in costly oil and wine, sets him on his own beast, bringing him to an inn and taking care of him.* He could have stopped so much sooner than this and still have more than fulfilled any possible rule about one's duty to a wounded stranger. But he did not stop even then. He goes further in leaving money to pay for the man's ongoing care, and he leaves enough money to pay the man's room and board for three weeks. Furthermore, if anything further might be needed he promised to pay up the outstanding balance when he returned. *The Samaritan* left a blank check for a total stranger.

The Good Samaritan is not intent with merely *doing his duty*. The point is that he is not aware of duty at all – any more than we are aware of duty when we act generously toward ourselves. We act so toward ourselves because we want to do so. *The Samaritan* does likewise; he gives and loves because he desires to help a stranger, come what may. He loves his neighbor as he loves himself.

Jesus finishes the parable, and we imagine that the lawyer is speechless. When Jesus asks him who was the most neighborly, it seems he cannot bring himself to say the word, *the Samaritan*. He says only *him who showed mercy*. Jesus shows the lawyer that the law he kept, which parsed out who constituted neighbors, was not able to give life or bring righteousness. In this parable, the law might have even left a man for dead on the side of the road. The law had no grace. Jesus says to the lawyer, *go and do thou likewise, or go, and you yourself do likewise*.

We hear plenty of people today who talk just like this lawyer from the Gospel. They qualify *who is or is not their neighbor* – to whom we should show love, who deserves it, and who does not. Of course, Jesus does not mean that we open ourselves up to fraud or allow others to take advantage of us. But we have heard plenty of fellow Christians see someone in need and say *they should have known better, or they don't deserve our help, or God helps those who helps themselves*. We forget ourselves; we take for granted the blessings we receive every day of our lives. We forget that the ability to receive Holy Communion is one of the greatest of these blessings, through which Christ longs to enter our hearts, fill us with His healing love, better us, repair us, redeem us, and save us! We forget the warning that to come away from the Lord's Altar with a cold heart, or a heart full of hatred, is a great sin. God calls each of one us who comes here today to be partakers of Holy Communion, to receive the life of Christ within ourselves, to show forth that life of Christ in our own lives. Here we encounter life much greater than our own, and we go out into the world recharged spiritually. Here we receive love from the King of Love, who keeps on loving us, and never ceases to want to heal and help us.

We are reminded this morning that the true Christian has the law of love written in his heart. The Spirit of Christ dwells in him; Christ's own image is renewed in his soul. For the Christian recognizes that he was once in the place of the poor traveler who was robbed and wounded by sin and the world. The Christian recognizes that he was found and loved, healed, and forgiven by the Good Samaritan, which is Jesus Christ, and having shown us mercy, He bids us to go and do likewise.

Blessed are the eyes that see this sight which brings the Cross into the life of the present and assures of every blessing...blessed are the eyes that see in Jesus the pardon of sins past, the pledge of present grace, and the hope of future glory. Amen.