

Ash Wednesday C 2019  
March 6, 2019 :: Matthew 6: 1-6, 16-21  
Fr. Jim Cook

## *“Having Sound Eyes.”*

If we were to be honest, we would have to admit that, for the most part, we don't see the things and people around us, as they really are. But rather, and as often as not, we see things and people through the lenses of our fears and prejudices.

And scripture is clear when it acknowledges both the reality of that situation, and the reason for it. And the reason is simple: Our humanity has been bent and distorted by what we in the Church call “the power of sin.” And for that reason, our perception of reality, is viewed through the lens of our brokenness. We see the world the way we are. And this condition in which we find ourselves is, unfortunately, both inevitable and universal.

There is no one who does not suffer from it.

Let me give you an example of how this works, by describing an apocryphal event that took place at another church, during their normal Sunday morning worship. Now, you've probably heard the story, but even if you haven't, the ending is predictable.

The minister began his sermon by asking the congregation to recall what special thing had happened that week in the news; it was an event which had everyone talking. But only silence came from the pews.

Yet, the minister persisted, “Come on, people! What happened this week that was truly remarkable?” Still, there was only silence, but now with a little fidgeting tossed in.

“Alright, then,” he said, “I’ll tell you. It was that anonymous person who won the million-dollar lotto, and then gave the winning ticket to St. Jude’s Hospital. Wow! Could you believe that!?” Still silence.

Finally, the minister tried another approach, and said, “Now, can anybody tell me what kind of person would do this? What kind of person would give away millions of dollars — without any notoriety, or any tax benefits?” There was more silence, and more fidgeting.

“C’mon,” the priest begged, “you know the answer. What kind of person would do something like that?”

Finally, a little boy jumped to his feet, and blurted out, “A stupid person!”

And, with that, the minister sat down.

In his Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew’s gospel, Jesus taught on the importance of having a “sound eye” (Mt 6:22-23). He said:

“The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!”

Obviously, Jesus is speaking metaphorically, but his point is well-made. For the human eye is the opening through which light is admitted to the body. The clarity of the light, and the accuracy

of the images that we perceive, depend upon the health of the eye. If the eye is not healthy, then light cannot shine through.

Well, in much the same way, our spiritual eyes need to be healthy in order to be filled with God's light. But the problem is that too many people go through life with spiritual eyes that don't see as well as they should, and are reluctant to admit that fact. To use St. Paul's words, we "see through a glass dimly," and that's just fine. But because we are so often afraid of change — even change potentially for the better — we allow ourselves to go through life viewing others through the distorted lens of our brokenness and fear.

However, Lent is about faith overcoming fear. Lent is about grace perfecting us, despite our weaknesses and shortcomings. Lent is about asking God to open our eyes to see the world as it really is. To see it as God sees it. To love it as God loves it. And that makes Lent a season filled with possibility and hope.

This year, at St. Andrew's Church, we are encouraging people to engage in a special kind of prayer, to help them connect with God, and perhaps improve our spiritual vision. The kind of prayer that I'm talking about involves using an Episcopal Rosary, and

some prayers that have been written for this season. Thus, it's a type of prayer which employs our minds, and our voices, and our bodies. And while you might use this type of daily prayer merely as a lenten discipline, it might very well become a significant part of your ongoing spiritual journey. And so I invite you to join me in taking on this kind of prayer during the season of Lent.

Finally, all this brings me back to the question that minister asked of his congregation: "What kind of person would give away a million dollars to a hospital?" Well, my hope is that, when this season is concluded, we might be able to see that it was *not* a stupid person. But rather, that it was a person whose eyes see with the clarity that only a lenten world can offer us.

Would that we all had such eyes.

Amen.