

NOW I SEE
BY THE REV. WALTER E. ORTHWEIN III

"One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see." (John 9:25)

The skeptics tried to reason with this man, and how maddening it must have been! Their arguments, their alternate explanations for the miracle, fell flat before his simple declaration of what he knew to be so: "I was blind, now I see."

In this miracle, as in all His miracles, the Lord was demonstrating, correspondentially, His power to heal our *spiritual* infirmities. If His purpose had been only to restore people's physical sight, we'd have to wonder why He didn't heal all blind people instead of just a few. But if we reflect on the spiritual significance of this story, then the story itself, along with the other stories and teachings in the Scriptures, becomes a perpetual means whereby all people's spiritual blindness can be cured.

His disciples asked why this man had been born blind—was he guilty of some sin that brought this affliction upon him? No, the Lord said, it was so "the works of God could be revealed in him."

Here we have a good general rule regarding all afflictions, including our own: they are opportunities for us to experience the Lord's power. When we observe people dealing with an illness or some other limitation, when we see the human spirit triumph over some terrible natural circumstance, as we so often do, it is really the work of God we are witnessing. And when the afflicted person himself or herself sees the truth of this, as they often do, they are receiving a gift more valuable than what they have lost. Physical illnesses may persist—and eventually everyone's body wears out and dies; this is part of the order of life—but if, in the process, the soul is healed, and we come to know within ourselves the goodness of God, then the physical distress that served to turn us toward Him turns out to have been a blessing in disguise.

When someone says, "Now I see," they usually mean, "Now I understand." The seeing they are referring to is mental. Blindness, spiritually, is ignorance or a lack of understanding of spiritual things, an inability to sense the heaven that lies around us. Spiritual blindness is a defect in the eye of faith.

The things *that* eye (the eye of faith) sees are the most important. They answer (not in a theoretical or philosophical way, but in a *living* way) such questions as: Is there a God? Is there a merciful Divine providence governing the universe and working to save our souls? Do the Scriptures actually contain the Word of God? Is there life after death? Can faith be restored? Can the innocence and peace and carefree delight we knew in our childhood ever be regained?

The natural part of the mind, before it is ordered by the spiritual part and opened to the light of heaven, answers "no." And it will seize upon contrary appearances, and the logic and philosophy of materialism, to bolster its arguments. And even if the rational mind gets occasional glimpses of the truth, it is like lightning out of the east that vanishes in the west.

Faith isn't a matter of logic, nor of blind belief, but of what one *sees* to be true. This is why religious arguments accomplish little. One who does not see spiritual reality thinks one who does see it is imagining something that isn't actually there. The one who does see the reality of spiritual things thinks the one who does not is spiritually *blind*.

Religious debates are like two people looking up at an enormous pyramid. The top is obscured by a cloud. One person says the sides continue up to meet at the peak, while the other says they end at the cloud.

"But it's not always this cloudy, and I've seen the top," the one says. "There's a point to it."

"You say you've seen it, but I say you imagined it," the other one says.

"But many others have seen it also."

"So we're told," the skeptic replies.

"But the builder has left us the plans, and they show the pyramid with a beautiful marble capstone."

"But how do we know those plans are genuine?"

"Look at the sides, see how they converge. Can't you see that they must come together at the peak? Everything we can see below the cloud points to the existence of a peak at the top of the pyramid."

"I see no reason to conclude that at all," the other says. "The pyramid is flat on the bottom, why shouldn't it be flat on the top too?" And so it goes.

Spiritual reality is like the top of the pyramid—you either see it or you don't. Logic and evidence may confirm and support what you see, or don't see, but in the end, you either see it or you don't.

An example of how the sides of the pyramid point to something invisible to natural eyes is life after death. What we can see is that most people grow in wisdom throughout their lives and become better people. We expect this, and would think something had gone wrong if someone was no wiser at age 70 than he had been at age 20. Isn't it reasonable from this obvious fact of life to conclude that people continue to live after the death of the body? If not, then all that spiritual growth and improvement was for nothing—at least as far as the person himself is concerned.

Imagine a factory in which the product being made gets to the end of the assembly line and is then . . . discarded. Or imagine a school in which the students are being prepared for . . . nothing. Can't we see that this world is a soul school? More than anything else, that's what this world is—a school in which human spirits are formed and perfected and prepared for a spiritual use.

Is it not reasonable, then, to expect that human beings, after a lifetime of being prepared to live in a heavenly society and serve as angels able to communicate Divine love and wisdom to others, will continue to live after their "graduation" from this world?

This line of reasoning may not "prove" there is a heaven to one

who just doesn't see the truth of it, but for those who do see it, even if it is an obscure and momentary view, it confirms that truth and encourages them to keep looking in hopes of gaining a better view of spiritual reality.

This statement in the work *Divine Love and Wisdom* is well known in the church: "Thought from the eye closes the understanding; thought from the understanding opens the eye" (46).

When your understanding has been opened by the truths of revelation, then the eye also is opened—and the things you see with your eyes—even many things which might otherwise be seen as evidence against Divine and spiritual things, are seen as examples of Divine order and indications of the Lord's merciful providence.

When the eye of the mind has been opened, then abstract, spiritual truths rest upon a natural foundation. They don't depend upon dogma or logic or wishful thinking or anything else; you see them. They are not the product of reason, but are confirmed by reason and by things seen with the eye of the body. When this is the order of our thought, natural things are seen in a whole new way. We see countless "proofs" of God all around us.

Why did the Lord spit on the ground and make clay to put on the man's eyes? Surely He could have healed him with a word, or a touch of His hand, or just a thought, for that matter. But consider this: earthly knowledge, the countless bits of information we glean from the world around us, are like dust until they are transformed by truth from the mouth of God. Then they cohere and can be applied in ways that will open our understanding of spiritual things.

The center and essence of everything that exists and has any being at all is the Divine substance out of which all things are formed. Therefore, it is only to the extent that we see how things relate to God that we see them at all. Not that we can necessarily put into words how this or that natural object relates to God, but at some level, deep in our minds, the connection needs to be made.

Denying the existence of God is a mental condition similar to the physical ailment known as macular degeneration, in which the center of one's visual field is lost. The natural part of reality is peripheral; to see only the natural is to be blind to the center of the picture.

While we should have confidence in the spiritual truths we have come to see, we should also never lose sight of the fact that everyone has blind spots. It is easier to see the blindness of others than our own but, as the Lord said, we must remove the plank from our own eye first (Matthew 7:3).

All of us are at least partially blind, spiritually. We're like the man who said to the Lord: "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24). That prayer is an essential step in gaining spiritual sight. Healing begins with a humble acknowledgment of our need to be healed. That acknowledgment produces a desire for the truth that heals, and this is essential. The *will* to see makes us sensitive to the light of heaven and capable of being affected by it. Most spiritual blindness results, not from ignorance or from an inability to understand spiritual things, but simply from a lack of interest in such things (see *Heaven and Hell* 603).

"Faith is the eye of love," the Writings say (*Arcana Coelestia* 3863.12). Far from being "blind," genuine faith is an *inner vision* of what is good and true—a vision directed by love. The secret to gaining spiritual sight, then, is that our will, the quality of love that prevails in us, must be changed.

Remember what the Lord said in the Sermon on the Mount: "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*" (Matt. 5:8). There is the secret of spiritual sight, to be pure in heart. It is a law of Divine providence that, "A person is admitted interiorly into truths of faith and goods of charity only so far as he can be kept in them until the end of his life" (*Divine Providence* 221-233 heading). The reason is to protect us from profaning what is good and true. It is better for us not to see and acknowledge the truth in the first place than to accept it and then reject it. This is why the Word teaches regarding people who were *unwilling* to

acknowledge the Divinity of the Lord and see Him as He truly is, that, "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they should see with their eyes and understand with their heart, lest they should turn, so that I should heal them" (John 12:40; *Divine Providence* 231).

The interior part of our being is the *will*, the faculty of love. When the will is affected by spiritual truth—when truth touches our hearts—then we gain an “interior” view of it. We see the inner goodness of it, the good of which it is the form, and to which it leads.

We begin by *knowing* what is true, from the Word and the teachings of the church. Then we can progress to *understanding* the truth, by reflecting on what it means and how it applies to life. And finally, we can come to *see* the truth—really to see it, with the eye of love, as something good and beautiful—a pearl of great price.

To get an idea of the difference between just *knowing* something and truly *seeing* the value of it, imagine you're at the beach one day and go swimming in the ocean. The lifeguard points out a number of life preservers lying on the beach in case of emergency; but it's a sunny day, the water is clear and calm, and you pay little attention.

But later, the water becomes choppy and you suddenly realize you've drifted far out from the shore. The sky grows dark, heavy rain begins to fall, and there is lightning. The water's gotten cold and murky, the current is pulling you out to sea, your strength is gone, and you start to drown. At the last moment before you slip beneath the waves, your hand brushes against something—a life preserver. You grab it. *Now* you see, in a way you did not before, what a life preserver is.

The Lord's words are words of life. Our salvation depends on them. But until we see this—really perceive the absolute truth of it—they are like life preservers on a sunny beach. Not really seen.

No argument can cure spiritual blindness; it takes a miracle. Or

rather—what now takes the place of miracles, and actually surpasses them—the revelation given in the Heavenly Doctrine of the New Jerusalem, in which spiritual truths are set forth plainly, in which the Lord Himself is clearly seen.

“What are miracles over against these things?” the Writings teach. “Miracles are not done at this day, because they seduce men, and make them natural. They close the interiors of their minds, wherein faith ought to be rooted . . . What did the miracles effect which were done in Egypt with the sons of Israel? What did those miracles effect which were done before them in the desert? What those miracles when they entered into the land of Canaan? What the miracles which were wrought by Elijah and Elisha? What those which the Lord Himself wrought? *Was anyone ever made spiritual by their means?*” (*Invitation to the New Church* 46, emphasis added)

The reasonings of those who challenged the blind man's claim that the Lord had healed him echo down through the years, and in our own minds, challenging whatever higher perceptions of truth come to us. But all such reasoning is powerless to dissuade one who has *experienced* the healing power of the Divine.

Miracles compel belief, and such belief is shallow. Now we have something better than miracles, a revelation of Divine truth adapted to the rational mind.

We say “a revelation of Divine truth,” but it is more than that—it is a revelation of the One who is Truth Itself, and Good Itself, and Life itself, and God Himself: the Lord Jesus Christ. He is what the blind man's eyes were healed to see:

“Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him, He said to him, ‘Do you believe in the Son of God?’ He answered and said, ‘Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?’ And Jesus said to him, ‘You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you.’ Then he said, ‘Lord, I believe!’ And he worshiped Him” (John 9: 35-37). *Amen.*

Lessons: John 9; *Heaven and Hell* 126, 130, 630