

Pastoral Message: August 29, 2021

Today's readings call us, I think, to look deeper at what are the motivating factors that direct us. As believers, we call this discernment. We often talk about listening to the Lord for guidance and direction. We can never have full certainty that we are following the Lord's direction, but our tradition gives us some tools to help us know we are on the right track. This makes it very necessary to slow down; something at the beginning of covid 19 we were forced to do. Now we seem to be moving with restrictions at a more busy pace. The distress of over a year of this has anxiety running high in the community and world around us. To add to this, all our electronic devices, as helpful as they can be sometimes, do not provide an opportunity for us to unplug and to pay attention to what is happening inside us.

I believe the following story offers insight on how we learn in the spiritual life to see at a deeper level. Jacques Lusseyran was a blind resistance fighter in World War II and wrote a memoir called *And There WAS Light*. Lusseyran was not born blind, but as a young boy he got in a scuffle with some other boys at school and, falling on his teachers desk, drove one lens deep into his right eye while another part tore his retina on the left. This left him completely and permanently blind by age 7. The gift his parents gave him was they never felt sorry for him but encouraged him. Lusseyran's mother learned Braille with him, and he would go on to get an education. His parents encouraged him to let them know what insights he had by living in the world as blind. He came to realize he could see on a very deep level. For example, he could tell what kind a tree was, whether it was an oak, a poplar or a nut tree, by the levels of sounds. The great discovery Lusseyran made in 1944 was how light changed with his inner condition. When Lusseyran was sad or afraid, the light decreased at once. When Joyful or attentive the light increased. Lusseyran learned that the best way to see the inner light and remain in its presence was to love. In January of 1944 Lusseyran was shipped to Buchenwald with two thousand of his countrymen. It was here that he learned how hate worked against him. When consumed by anger he would run into things, slam into walls and trip over stuff. When calling himself back to attention, he found that he could move with ease again. The great lesson was that no one, not even the Nazis, could turn out the light inside him without his consent. Even though from time to time he would lose it, he always knew where he could find it again.

I think this story describes discernment well. In Joshua, the Torah, the sacred word listened to from within would keep the people of God moving in the right direction. Today from James we hear of what we might call the inner compass of that word, that through acts of love and justice we are directed towards the light. The gospel reminds us to see beyond externals and look at the intentions of our hearts; that religion in any society can do more damage than good if it is not guided by love of God and love of neighbor. This inner compass we can be assured is the best way to continue walking towards the light. I close with an insight that Lusseyran discovered only ten days after his accident that left him blind. May his discovery be a guide for us to walk towards the light.

"I had completely lost sight of my eyes; I could not see the light of the world anymore. Yet the light was still there. Its source was not obliterated. I felt it gushing for the every moment and brimming over, I felt how it wanted to spread out over the world. I had only to receive it. It was unavoidably there. It was all there, and I found again its movements, and shades that is, its colors, which I loved so passionately a few weeks before. This was something entirely new, you understand all the more so since it contradicted everything that those who have eyes believe. The source of light is not in the outer world. We believe that is only because of a common delusion. The light dwells where life also dwells: within ourselves."