

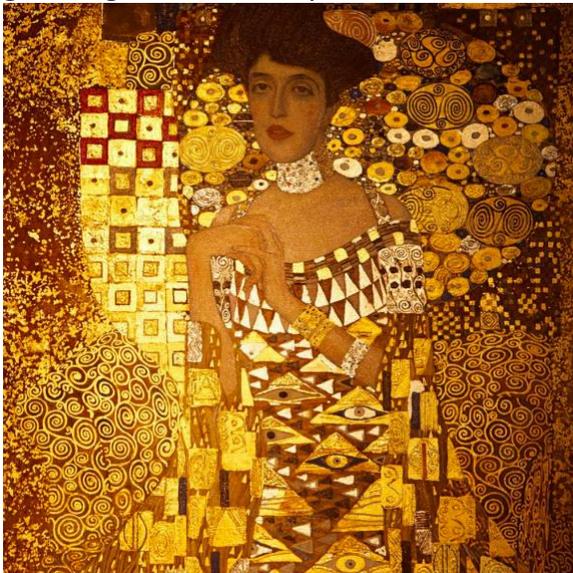
30th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cycle B, 10.24.21

Jeremiah 31:7-9/Hebrews 5:1-6/Mark 10:46-52

SEEING WITH THE EYES OF FAITH, HOPE & LOVE

Clarity of vision – that’s something we all long for and we all need, yet something that can be so illusive in our personal lives, in society and in the Church. There’s a wonderful movie entitled **Woman in Gold** -- a powerful film about great art, horrific crimes, and inspiring perseverance. It tells the story of Maria Altmann, a proud, Austrian Jewish woman who convinces a young attorney to help her regain **Woman in Gold**, a painting of her aunt by the artist Gustav Klimt, made when Maria was a little girl living with her family in Austria.



The priceless canvas, as well as thousands of other valuable artwork, was looted by the Nazis before Maria and her husband fled Austria. The rather imperious Maria is convinced of the righteousness of her cause, but the attorney, Randy Schoenberg, the son of Maria's best friend, at first wants no part of this wild goose chase. The attorney knows nothing about art restitution law; he has just begun a demanding new job, he's saddled with debt

after a failed attempt to launch his own law firm, and his wife is expecting their second child. He agrees to talk to Maria only to please his mother.

At one of their first meetings, Ryan is explaining the long, complicated legal process ahead if Maria decides to pursue this case of getting her painting back. Suddenly, Maria, acting motherly, stops Ryan and says, *"How can you see out of those glasses? They're filthy!"* She then pulls the glasses off his face and cleans them with spittle and a napkin. *"There!"* she says, placing them back on his surprised face. *"That's better. Help you see more clearly."* It's a prophetic moment in the film.

Maria and Ryan go to Vienna to see if they can find the necessary documents to make their case. The Austrian government is determined to keep the painting in Austria and stonewalls them. But with the help of a local journalist, they manage to penetrate the wall of secrecy and obtain the documents that establish Maria's legal claim to the famous painting. Before leaving Austria, Ryan and Maria visit the Holocaust memorial in Vienna, where Ryan recognizes the names of members of his own family. It's a transforming moment for Ryan.



He excuses himself to go to the men's room where he breaks down in tears and rage. He sees, for the first time, that

Maria's crusade is not just about a painting belonging to her family. It's also about his own family and the countless other Jewish families lost in the Holocaust. Randy is now fully committed to the case which will become the focus of his life for the next eight years. Randy now sees Maria's fight as more than just a property battle over a painting - it's a matter of justice for those who came before him and for keeping their memory alive for his own children and for his children's children.

In today's Gospel, a blind man asks to see. Jesus responds not by mixing mud and spittle or touching the man's eyes or looking to heaven in prayer, as the other gospels recount the healing; Jesus says, basically, *Look with the eyes of the faith you already possess.*



The man receives his sight - but Jesus also affirms the vision that the man already possesses: the ability to "see" God's compassion in his midst, to "see" the possibilities for transforming hope and re-creating love to heal the brokenness in his life, to "see" his ability to be the means for God's justice and reconciliation. Once Ryan Schoenberg looks at Maria's cause as more than a legal matter and "sees" it as one of justice in which he, as a Jew, is an integral part, the transformation begins.

Jesus opens the eyes of our hearts as well, enabling us to realize the

opportunities we have to bring life and light, healing and peace, justice and mercy along our way to the dwelling place of God. Faith calls us to "see" with the human heart, to perceive in the spirit. The miracle in today's gospel is not so much what Jesus did for blind Bartimaeus, but what He can do for you and me, because there are so many kinds of blindness. We often see only what we want to see, or what our culture programs us to see. Our culture can be the biggest blind spot of all. Someone described our relationship to culture being like fish in the ocean. Fish live in the ocean their whole life: swimming, eating, reproducing without a thought to the ocean all around them. Our relationship is the same with our world. We don't give much thought to its existence, its presumptions, its biases. We can be as blind to it as fish are to the sea. Unless we question things and step back a little to take a critical look at the events and people and media and politics and economy that shape our world, and our church, too, we can't see the new ways of being to which Jesus calls us.

Christ came to bring a new vision to the world – the reign of God. He heals the blind man to show us that God desires to free us all from suffering and to make the world whole. With the blind man we have to call out to the Lord: *Jesus, son of David, have pity on us!* We have to make our request of the Lord: *Master, we want to see!* Then, with Jesus, we have to make God's desire for the healing and wholeness of the world our own dream and hope – working to make all things whole and, with restored vision, see the world and all people through the eyes of faith, hope and love.

I had the joy of attending Dan Nevares' ordination ceremony at the Cathedral of Christ the Light this morning. Dan, along with six other Jesuit seminarians, were ordained by Bishop Barber to the Transitional Diaconate, the final year of ministry training before these men are ordained to the priesthood. It was a beautiful ceremony, but as I sat in the section near the altar reserved for concelebrating priests, at least sixty or seventy of us vested clerics, a sinking feeling came over me. What a picture of male domination and exclusivity we must have presented for any women in attendance. In his address to the assembly this morning our bishop described for these new deacons the challenges they will face in serving the church -- the fact that our churches are not as full as they once were, lines for the confessional are shorter, or in the case of our parish, nonexistent. I wonder if it ever crosses his mind that perhaps the reason many people, especially young people, are not participating could be the intransigence of the church, the refusal of the institution and its hierarchy to face the cultural realities of our world: a fuller understanding of human sexuality, of cultural diversity, of a desire for greater inclusion and shared leadership.



Culture isn't only 'poisoned air'; it's also the winds of change that blow. It brings us new social and spiritual realities that we

must face if we are to speak to the real needs of real people. A Vatican commission to study the scriptural and historical basis for ordaining women to the diaconate was established in 2016 and again in 2020. These efforts seem to have progressed very little, even under the leadership of an enlightened Pope like Francis. This is only one issue among the many we face on every level -- in the church and in society -- to which we are blind. We need the healing of hardened hearts and closed minds. As we hear the story of blind Bartimaeus today, let's thank God for the gift of sight and resolve to respect and not endanger those gifts that expand our field of vision and open our hearts to the divine and to new ways of being. We follow the voice of Jesus, the Master, who alone can cure the blindness we suffer in all its forms. What the crowd said to Bartimaeus, they also say to us: *Take courage, get up! Jesus is calling you!*



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