
From Luke 24:

¹³ Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about eleven kilometres from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing, Jesus Himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶ but their eyes were kept from recognising Him.... ²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He interpreted to them the things about Himself in all the Scriptures... ³⁰ When He was at the table with them, He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened, and they recognised Him....

From 1 Peter 1:

¹⁸ You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ... ²³ You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God.

Currently in Australia (as in a number of other countries around the world) there is a discussion emerging about when restriction should be eased in relation to the lockdown regarding the coronavirus COVID-19. Many people are aware of this discussion, with most people supportive of the restrictions framework that has been put in place by the Federal Government and National Cabinet, as also those of various State Authorities. Australia has a very high compliance rate which supports this. However, the questions is, ‘When, and how, should these restrictions be eased?’ Here there are many points of view from those who are hypervigilant and are wary of what may be eased, to those who are arguing for a rapid and complete de-escalation of restrictions.

Behind these various ‘arguments’ are various points of view. And we know that how we ‘see things’ is shaped by many factors. These include knowledge and understanding of facts, the experiences a person may have had, one’s philosophy or philosophy of life, a person’s mindset or outlook on life, a person’s ideology or faith or even religion, and other factors such as the way a person may process information at an intellectual and physiological and psychological perspective. A person’s worldview consists of the values, ideas or the fundamental belief system that determines their attitudes, beliefs and ultimately, actions.

The way we perceive and respond to situations is affected by many things. Are you able to identify those things that shape the way you perceive things in life and ‘the world’? In this do you believe you able to empathetically understand another person’s worldview? This does not mean to know in simple a cognitive sense, but also ‘putting yourselves in their shoes’. How do we perceive our own worldview, as also a worldview of another person, and bring them together for mutual understanding and better outcomes?

In our Holy Gospel for this day (Luke 24:13-35) we hear the encounter of Jesus with the disciples on the Road to Emmaus. As the disciples were walking along the road discussing what had happened concerning Jesus' death, Jesus Himself came near and went with them. And then Scripture records "But their eyes were kept from recognising Him..." This is a much discussed verse of the Bible.

Luke 24:16 acknowledges that the disciples couldn't 'see' (that is, recognise) Jesus. At one level, this is quite obvious – who expects to literally see someone who had been put to death as Jesus had? But the tense of the verb "were kept" also raises another level of discussion.

In the Bible there is what is known as 'divine passives' – that is, a use of a verb that does not express an agent. If I say, 'the ball was hit,' that's a use of the passive voice with no agent expressed. Who, exactly, hit the ball? In the First Testament the writers of Scripture would often try to avoid the use of God's holy name (in a strict understanding of the Second Commandment to not use God's name in vain). So instead of saying something like "God stopped the rain" they would instead say something like "the rain stopped falling", with the idea those listening knew they were speaking of God as the agent of the action. And so when it comes to Luke 24:16 ("their eyes were kept from recognising Him") the question is, who or what stopped the disciples from recognising Jesus? Was it their own 'worldview', or was it God Himself? This is much discussed in Christendom, with some early manuscripts of the Bible adding lines such as "and were covered" or "now He had veiled their eyes", ascribing it to Christ. But the general belief is that the shortest manuscripts are the most reliable, and we are left with this interesting question, "Why were they kept from recognising Jesus?"

In Isaiah 6:9 there is this verse 'Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.' This is quoted by Jesus (Mark 4:12). It seems as time as though God hardens peoples' hearts. The belief here is that people simply do not want to see things from another point of view, and the more one tries to convince a person otherwise, the more stubborn they become (think of Moses before Pharaoh in Egypt).

Is there a point where Jesus kept the disciples from recognising Him so that they may learn a deeper truth? Have there been times in your life where you didn't understand something at some point, to only later come to a deeper appreciation of things? Or does pride and our own sense of worldview make it difficult to 'see things' from another perspective? Could it be as Jesus said to those disciples "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe"? (Luke 24:25)

But we also hear that Jesus, "beginning with Moses and all the prophets, interpreted to them the things about Himself in all the Scriptures." And later "When He was at the table with them, He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognised Him...."

There is a question here of 'Where do you look to find God speaking to you in your life?' Is it in your own 'worldview'? Do you look to your own 'experiences' or 'understanding of life'? Or are you open to listening to His Word, and to have your own 'worldview' challenged and even changed?

Jesus radically changed the worldview of those disciples who were despondent on the road. They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while He was talking to us on the road, while He was opening the scriptures to us?' But not long later they ran back to Jerusalem to report to the other disciples what they had seen – that Jesus is alive.

In our Second Reading for today (1 Peter 1:17-23) we are given this word through the Apostle Peter: "18 You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ... 23 You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God." This Bible verse speaks about the radically changed 'worldview' for believers in the risen Lord Jesus.

Peter says "you have been ransomed from futile ways". Earlier Peter had said this (1 Peter 1:14-15): "Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. Instead, as He who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct." The implication is that there is a change in the way a person lives life. But there is another dimension as well. Peter is writing to those who are 'exiles' (v.17). And this is not simply some 'spiritual metaphor'. This is the actual situation of the people to whom he is writing. They had been scattered due to persecution of Christians (cf. Acts 8:1).

How do you 'see things' in difficult situations? Is it easy sometimes for us to be overwhelmed by fear? And have you ever had some experience where it seems that others around you are trying to control a situation that seems limiting to you? Are there times when we do need to experience this? And when should such restrictions be eased? When, and in what way, are people to be trusted? In what way do you trust (or do not trust) others around you? Do they believe you actually trust them?

Peter wrote to Christians to see things from another point of view. The people had been redeemed from a futile way of living. They had been "been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God". Peter says that "Through Christ you have come to trust in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God." (1 Peter 1:21).

Faith and hope... don't we all need that in life...? Aren't 'faith and hope' necessary for a positive disposition on life, as also for positive relationships with those around you? And how do you respond when your 'faith' and 'hope' in others is broken?

On the Road to Emmaus the disciples said "We had hoped..." (Luke 24:21). This was past tense... it seems they were giving up on their hope... But the situation here seems to be that disciples had made themselves the subject of their faith and Jesus the object of their faith. In others words, they still wanted something of 'being in control' of their faith. Therefore, when things didn't go according to the way they thought it should have (ie: Jesus shouldn't have died— after all, isn't God 'victorious' and 'powerful), they had lost hope. They were living in 'me' and 'I' terms and had struggled then to understand Jesus' words about Himself. That is

why Jesus responded, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the *prophets* have declared!” And then He explained to them the Scriptures.

Where can we find ‘hope’ and ‘purpose’ for life? Is it possible to ‘see’ and ‘know’ God? And if so, how shall do we ‘see’ and ‘have fellowship’ with Him?

In the book ‘The Spirituality of the Cross’ the author (Dr. Gene Veith) outlines some of the ways that people (including himself) have tried to ‘find’ and ‘know’ God. One ‘way’ is ‘moralism’ – that is, the search to be a ‘good person’. Another approach to a ‘spiritual’ and ‘meaningful’ life paradoxically is seen in ‘speculation’, that is, the search for knowledge. And a third way people try is ‘mysticism’. But the problem with much of this ‘searching after God’ is that the basis of ‘spirituality’ - and the basis for ‘knowing God’ - rests within oneself. And if you think about that logically for a moment, these approaches are doomed to failure. After all, if we rely on our experience within a finite world to learn something of the ‘infinite’, then how can that be...? Is that not a contradiction for us to learn something of God from within our limited human world?

How do we ‘see’ and ‘know’ God? Where will we ‘find’ Him? Those early disciples recognised Jesus after He spoke God’s Word to them, and in the ‘breaking of bread’. Jesus has given us the gift of His Word whereby God may speak to us.

Yes, there are times in our lives when the eyes of our hearts seem to ‘cannot see’ God and His ‘love’. Instead, we ‘see the world’ with a point of view that is limited, and perhaps even selfish. Such is human nature. But the great gift is that no matter how we may struggle to ‘see’, God still walks the road of life with us in Christ Jesus. You are “born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God.”

There are many ‘points of view’ in our world. Sometimes these are explainable because of who you are, and your own experiences. But as Peter has said “Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart.” This, in part, means seeking to genuinely understand another person’s point of view. But we are also to look at things from God’s point of view. And the great news here is that He says to you that “You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God.” Your faith and hope are in God.

We live from the perspective of Easter. God has done an incredible work. The tomb has been emptied. Death has been defeated. A new world has been born, a new vision has been given, and a new way of living has been prescribed. We are people of new perspective. We have seen what God has done in Jesus Christ. We no longer live in fear; but with a radical view of life that comes from seeing the risen Lord. And the great gift we have is that no matter how we may ‘feel’ about our ‘faith’, God is present, even when we don’t ‘feel’ that way. God walks with you always in life in Jesus. May you rejoice in His love, and His presence in your life, now and always. Amen.