

Jesus gives the man born blind, two gifts.

First, Jesus gives him the gift of physical sight. It is difficult for us to imagine suddenly being able to see after spending all of our lives in darkness. The man is overwhelmed by the splendor and beauty of the world around him. He sees the expressions on peoples faces, and the look of love and tenderness from his mother for the first time.

Perhaps the closest we can come to understanding this is from the example of two brothers, Jimmy and Jace. They were both born with red/green color blindness. The brothers see as clearly as anyone else, but the colors red and green dissolve into murky shades of yellow. Even the colors they can see, such as blue, are dull and lifeless.

In a touching video, Jimmy's father holds a bunch of brightly colored balloons, points to the orange one, and asks his son to name the color. There is a long pause before Jimmy hesitantly says, "Green?" His father then points to a green balloon and gently tells Jimmy, "this is green." "It looks orange to me," replies the teenager.

Jimmy is then given a pair of glasses designed to correct red-green color blindness. He puts them on and looks up. His mother, holding the camera, can be heard off screen asking him what he sees. But Jimmy can't speak. He is so overwhelmed by the vividness of the colors that tears are rolling down his cheeks. He turns to his brother, Jace, hugs him, and then passes on the glasses. Jace, too, is overwhelmed and only manages to say, "it's so bright."

There are more videos like this, of people seeing the vibrant colors of the world around them for the first time. Far and away the most typical responses are tears of joy.

This perhaps helps us to understand in some small way how overpowering it must have been for the blind man to suddenly be given sight. Jesus opens up a new world for him; a glorious, awe-inspiring world of human experience. Joy, amazement, and gratitude must have filled the man's mind and heart.

He now had a life he could never have dreamed of.

But Jesus gave the man a second gift, the gift of spiritual sight, the gift of faith. When the man refuses to give in to the pressure of the pharisees, to deny Christ, he is excommunicated, thrown out of the temple and separated from his community. When Jesus comes to him, and he recognizes the Son of Man who has given him sight, he falls on his knees in worship and adoration, in the middle of the crowded temple courtyard.

It is important to note that the man did not ask for his sight, nor did Jesus offer to restore it. This was a gift of grace freely given by God.

We too have been freely given two gifts from God, our physical lives and our spiritual lives.

Scripture tells us that in the beginning God made the heaven and the earth. That is He made two worlds, two planes of reality, the natural world that we see all around us, and the supernatural world.

As creatures of both flesh and spirit we live in both worlds at the same time. In order that we might recognize God and walk with Him in the Garden we were given the gift of faith, of spiritual sight, we call it grace.

But our first parents turned away from God, rejected his gifts and so lost that sanctifying grace that allows us to recognize the Son of Man. As a result we perceive the supernatural world only dimly, as if we were suffering a type of spiritual color blindness.

But that grace is restored to us in the waters of baptism. Just as the man born blind was sent to wash in the Pool of Siloam, the waters of Baptism restore our spiritual vision allowing us to see and recognize Jesus, Lord, God and Savior.

And so as baptized Christians we enjoy these two gifts from God, a natural life, and a supernatural life. Which do we value more?

Because we are here today, as members of His Church, the question is not difficult to answer. We come together to worship God, to express our sorrow for our sins and to ask for His forgiveness. We come together to profess our faith and obtain the strength and graces we will need for the week ahead.

We could be doing so many other things, sports, hobbies, family activities, but we have chosen to be here because we value the gift of faith that places God first in our lives.

But valuing God's supernatural gifts does not make us indifferent to the

natural gifts; they are connected. When we suffer physically, it affects our spiritual life. Likewise when we are having spiritual difficulties, it tends to affect our physical life as well.

Our faith would have no meaning without life.

This is why the Church has always, from its earliest days, defended the right to human life.

Once God gives a human being the first gift, physical life, which is the basis for all subsequent gifts, no one has a right to treat that human life with contempt. But abortion does just that. So does embryonic stem cell research. So does human cloning, and in vitro fertilization. So does terrorism.

There is no grey area on these issues: it is always an evil act to willingly destroy or abuse innocent human life.

There are other issues that we can argue about, debate on, and even disagree over. Economic and immigration policies, and issues of social justice come to mind. But none of them involve intrinsically evil acts like killing innocent human life.

On some issues, even faithful Catholics can debate and disagree. But not when it comes to the greatest of our natural gifts - life itself.

But even life takes second place when it comes to our first priority: our relationship with Christ the Lord. That's why the martyrs who refused to deny Christ even to save their own lives did the right thing. That's

why the man born blind stood up to the Pharisees, even though it meant a type of social death.

Even though we may value our spiritual life above our physical life, it is hard to keep our priorities straight. We experience the pleasures of our natural life so deeply that they can overtake our perception of our supernatural life, especially if our natural life leads us away from the teachings of Christ.

Do we condone those intrinsically evil acts that take a human life? Do we engage in gossip or vulgar locker-room talk? Do we make excuses for dishonesty or deception? Do we ignore our conscience when it tells us that there is more to life than just having a good time?

We are here today because we all want to make an effort to be closer to Christ, to keep our priorities straight, but we still have our falls and failures. Only by strengthening our faith can we make progress on our journey back to God and the home we were created for.

To strengthen our faith we can follow the example of the man born blind.

First we can ask God for spiritual strength. While the man did not ask for his sight, he did ask Jesus to show him the Messiah, so that he could believe in him. We can ask God to show us more clearly His presence, truth, and love. After all, He is the Light of the World that drives back the darkness of emptiness, falsehood and hatred, how could He refuse such a request?

The other thing we can do is boldly defend our faith.

When the blind man was interrogated, he bore witness to Christ. The more they tried to intimidate him, the more resolute he was in bearing witness. Through that process, the eyes of his soul were gradually opened until he recognized in Jesus not just a man of God, not just a prophet, but the Messiah himself.

I am sure you have all heard many times that Christianity is under attack. And while that is true we may dismiss it somewhat because it always seems to happen somewhere else. But the attacks are becoming more frequent, and they are coming closer to home. Are we reluctant to defend our faith for fear of being “Cancelled?” Do we hesitate to speak the Truth because we are afraid of what others will think? Eleanor Roosevelt once said, “what other people think of me, is none of my business.”

This week, God will give each one of us a chance to boldly bear witness to Him. Let us pray that we are up to the task. Let us receive His Body and Blood reverently, in a state of grace, so that we may be strengthened to face the trials that await us.

Let us pray that our vision will be restored and that we will finally see the glories that await us and the splendor of God, and that the only tears we shed, will be tears of joy.