

It is difficult to have sight...

*Jn 9.1-7*

“He went and washed and came back able to see.” This text speaks about it so lightly – “and he came back able to see.” But I would so like to ask, “but how, exactly did he find his way back?” You see, when his eyes were opened, he found himself in another world. Earlier he had a way of orienting himself around town – sounds, smells, and reflexes told him where to go. I wouldn’t be surprised at all if, while he was blind, he could make it to the baths with relative ease. Many blind people can move around freely in places that are familiar to them. There is nothing strange in this. But how could he get back now? Everything that had helped him before, his whole world, has now been cast aside, literally washed away by completely new sensations – the play of light, the tumult of colors, forms and images. He simply couldn’t have oriented himself in this completely new world. To gain sight for him meant almost the same thing that going suddenly blind would mean for the rest of us. It meant losing all orientation.

Imagine what he might have felt when he gained his sight. I’m not sure, it’s probably impossible, but we’ll try anyway. All of a sudden a blue mirror-like surface is unfurled before your eyes. It’s speckled, gives off a blinding glare, light pouring out in front of you. You reach out your hand and carefully touch this surface with the end of your finger...ah, so that’s what water looks like! All around are white and beige spots. Until you’ve touched them and feel the heat from the rocks you don’t understand that these are the walls of the building that you’ve fumbled along so often. The familiar rustling around you suddenly turns into a tree with a green crown. And here’s the street vendor’s counter from which comes a familiar scent – warm and rich. Are these roundish, brown tablets really bread? “Hi, what’s with you?” you hear from off to the side. While before when you answered your friend you gave your answer to a sound – a low, almost hoarse voice. But now your answer is addressed to the face that is before you – dark, wrinkled, and with a grey beard. And now you see the ground. You take a step and see how your legs move. Your head immediately starts spinning, and you almost fall down. You grab on to something and notice the penetrating blue of the dome of the sky above this multicolored world...

How is it possible to find the road among the grey stones, the beige walls, the green trees and the many, many and every-varying faces that surround you? How is it possible not to get lost in this world of colors and shapes? How does one not drown in the all-encompassing and bottomless azure that opens wide above your head?

Actually, it’s not above your head, but below it! Newborn babies see the world upside-down for a few days. The thing is our eyes are built in such a way that they give an upside-down image. The image flips and becomes normal only in the brain. And the brain has not yet learned how to turn everything over...So this blind man has not only had an unseen (literally) world opened up before him, this world is upside-down! This person has begun to take in the world around him in a completely different way. But the worlds “in a completely different way” are not strong enough to express it. The world has been turned upside-down, has exploded in color, has become an alien place for him – endlessly wonderful, but also endlessly strange, even scary. All of this, without a doubt, would be shocking and would be confusing. It probably is impossible for us to imagine it.

Maybe there is only one thing left that can be done. To close your eyes, to return to the familiar darkness, to continue in such a way until that moment when your head stops spinning under the influence of all these new impressions, to take your white cane in your hands and, as usual, to go by touch along the road, which has now again become for you familiar and understandable. Actually these words “to gain sight,” we usually use as a symbol to say that we have a new way

of orienting ourselves, that we see something better and know something more. To have sight means to know where and how to go, to know your own path better, to avoid many dangers, to gain confidence. In this sense we frequently look upon nonbelievers with a feeling of superiority. As if to say, we, of course, know better how everything works in life; we see the truth while they are blind and are completely limited in their abilities.

However does this really mean to gain sight? Here it is better to use a more translucent image – for example, get a white cane or a guide dog as a gift. With such a gift a blind person can more easily orient himself, and it is easier for him to avoid many sorts of dangers.

Yes, frequently faith in Christ is thought to mean a sort of cane which helps a blind person. “What does it mean to live a Christian life?” You can ask many different people, but the answer will be more or less the same – “it means to know something about the way the world is built, to know something which others don’t know or don’t accept. It means to follow certain rituals, for example, prayers or going to church. It means to hold to certain rules and limitations, for example, to not do much of what other people allow themselves to do...” More or less like this. But, really, how are we fundamentally different from others? We have a little bit of other information, a little bit different rules, a little bit different traditions. Maybe we are a bit more faithful, a bit better. But how is this different than a white cane in the hands of a blind person? No one will argue that this cane isn’t necessary for the blind person and its even quite useful. A blind person with a cane or with a guide dog has a huge advantage over a blind person without one. But if a blind person suddenly gains his sight, he loses all his advantages. So then, there is only one thing to do – close your eyes and return to the familiar darkness, to wait for now until your head stops spinning from new impressions and to take the white cane in your hands and again, as usual, to go by touch along the road that has once again, suddenly, become familiar to you.

Jesus says “I am the light of the world.” This is one of the most well-trodden biblical phrases. But if you think about it, you’ll see that it means that a person who has come to believe in Jesus should experience something like what happened to the blind man – a shaking-up, a shock. Jesus doesn’t put a white cane into our hands. He gives us sight – a feeling of unknown joy and happiness, but at the same time a feeling of confusion, of having lost your point of orientation. Because the news of Christ, the Gospel, is not new rules or knowledge which can be useful or practical. It is a new world, or rather a completely new dimension of this world.

All of a sudden it turns out that the love of God is more than all our sins. All of a sudden it turns out that despite logic and common sense, we will not be punished for all our crimes. Everything turns out to be different than we thought before. It turns out that it is not necessary to try with all your might to gain God’s good favor. It turns out that God doesn’t demand anything of us. It turns out that faith is not found in a pious and “correct” lifestyle, but in trust in the fact that, though we are unrighteous, we will be saved all the same. But how is this so? We were always been taught, again and again, that it is not so! We were told that the Church is useful since it encourages the development of morality. We were told that God punishes sin and rewards virtue. We were told that religion contributes to the upbringing and cleansing of society. We were told that Christians differ from all the rest exactly in this point – in their moral life. And then all of a sudden it becomes clear that that’s not the important thing at all – the thing is that God forgives sinners and accepts them into His love without any conditions whatsoever. All of a sudden it turns out that it is not the rather-difficult-but-all-the-same-clear-and-understandable law that stands behind and supports the world – it is limitless and endless love. Here, like the blind man, it happens quickly that every point of orientation is lost. We want a good cane or a well-trained guide dog so badly! But Jesus doesn’t give us anything of the sort. He doesn’t make new rules or help us keep the old ones. It’s actually the opposite that takes place. He takes away the firm

ground that we are accustomed to away from under our legs. He gives us sight. He says “I am the light of the world.”

And so, you who are living in the Gospel light, you believers, you Christians – have you been shaken up like that blind man who gained his sight? Or, just the opposite, do you feel that our faith puts everything in its place, acts as an iron law for our life? Is your spirit captured by the amazing variety of colors in this gospel message? Or do you see the world in black and white – here is clear good and there - clear evil. Does your head spin at every step because of the words of God’s eternal love? Or do you stand firmly, and it is hard to knock you down because you know the Divine law? Are you drunk with the sparkling light of forgives which you received as a gift for Christ’s sake? Or do you soberly see your abilities to deserve something from God?

And so, you don’t lose every point of orientation when diving into the sea of colors and shining plays of light, the strange shapes and wonderful imagines which are opened to us in the Gospel? Are you grasped by wonder and bewilderment from its unbelievable beauty and the strange playing of its light?

No?... I’m ashamed to say that for me, too, the answer is usually “no.”

And so, perhaps, maybe we just need to throw aside those white canes which we are still so shakingly clutching to – they’re not necessary anymore – and open our eyes. They have already been given sight long ago...