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“Do you see anything?” (Mark 8:24).

Jas 1:19-27; Mark 8:22-26

In Mark's miracles, Jesus is like a med student learning to diagnose with questions and then trying different treatments. In today's Gospel healing of the blind man, like the healing of the deafmute in Mark 7:31-37, Jesus first takes the man aside from the crowd and, with hands-on intimacy, explores the problem. In both miracles, he uses spittle, primitive by our germ phobia standards, but perhaps a kind of medicinal approach at the time based on the creation story in Genesis, when God forms Adam with moist mud. Jesus is, in fact, recreating the blind man to restore him to “spitting image” of God, a tender, almost motherly intervention, like a cat licking her kittens clean.

As with the deafmute, the actual healing comes in stages. The blind man first regains his ability to see light, color and movement, but either in a blur or because he has never seen before and needs to learn to identify what he is seeing. He sees people, but they are like “trees walking.” Jesus then touches his eyes and he sees clearly. What a fascinating moment this is as the blind man is introduced to things he has known by sound, feel and smell but never knew what they looked like. His imagination is being flooded with connections as he puts names to objects, fragments of sensation into a whole new world he is entering for the first time.

These miracles are what healing is really like. We naturally experience hearing, but we must learn to listen, to distinguish sounds from noise, then meaning from strings of words, and finally, to nuance the truth by knowing context, intention, distinctions between fact and fiction, reality and lies. We see without perceiving, perceive but through lenses determined by culture and preference, imposing our subjective views on others based on familiarity and loyalty in the form of racial or political prejudice.

To really listen and perceive requires miracles of healing that come with education, respect and compassion that open us to new truths, give us the clarity only love can teach us, what the fox tells the Little Prince, “that it is only with the heart that we can see rightly.” We cannot really pray without learning to listen to the inner whisper of the Spirit, discerning instead of judging, respecting differences instead dismissing others because they are wrong.

To grow as disciples, we must pray for spiritual eyes and ears. To follow Jesus, we must listen to his Word and see the road he is on. Perhaps the most important thing

we can pray for our country right now is for the ability to see clearly and listen deeply. This is the only way forward to a restored community and shared purpose based on common ground and interests.

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