

A Short Story - Help My Unbelief
by Deacon Gerry Palermo

Then the boy's father cried out, "I do believe, help my unbelief" (Mk 9:24).

Going blind is hard work.

First, of course, you work with the medical profession to take advantage of the therapies that are available for the illness or injury you have. Sometimes just a change in diet, increase in exercise, moderating your blood pressure, controlling the metabolism, or things like that, are all that are needed to arrest or significantly slow down the disease progression. Sometimes it's an operation or a series of operations to mechanically fix the problem.

Sometimes none of that works. Going blind is hard work.

The next stage is to learn how to cope with the approaching blindness. A whole new set of strategic skills and the enlivening different sensory skills in combination allow those going blind to maintain as much autonomous movement as possible. The ability to go where you want to go, and do the things you want to do come about by hard work.

It takes courage. Try closing your eyes and navigating across your home. Your home, a place you know, you don't know when you can't see. You have to know it in a new way.

I went to see him every day this week. Each day we would take about days gone by and events of faith and success. As a cleric I get to hear faith stories in addition to secular success stories. This is always moving. For him, Mr. Rogers, it is especially moving. He has always shown courage in the face of discrimination, racial prejudice and a community disregard for the poor. But he persisted. Even now at age 98 he remembers this important work. This is an important courage.

But this is different. Going blind is hard work that takes a particular courage.

Each day we celebrate Holy Communion together tucking ourselves in a quiet corner here or there. Until Friday, and the counselor was concerned. If you take Holy Communion here, are you not going to Church? You need to go to Church to find your way there too. Mr. Rogers blushed. The heat in his face made him know, for us we knew too.

Mr. Rogers you know the Bread I give you is not Bread but the Body of Christ? Yes.

And you know a Priest in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass following the institutional narrative of Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit, transubstantiates the Bread and Wine to the Body and Blood of Christ? Yes.

Recall also, Mr. Rogers, that when you eat this Bread... you too become transubstantiated little by little in each Holy Communion you receive. You become more a part of the life of Christ: Priest. Prophet and King. You are a living and walking part of the savior come for the aid of the human family.

Your calling is to spread the grace and blessing to all you meet. But you must meet them in the market place and in the world. Your mission is the world of the sighted people, so they can see what you see because you are transubstantiated in Christ.

This takes courage. But what a difference! In your advanced age, without eyesight, you will teach the world to see Grace and receive blessing from your very person, for from you I will bless the nations (Gen 12:2).

Can I know how the story ends? Maybe.

But just as I could see the blush I could see a new steel in his spine and resolve in his heart too.

A renewed purpose. A young man in an old body who desires to show courage in the face of discrimination against impairment and a community disregard for the old now has renewal to spread the gospel message by way of the very presence of grace within him.

You see, his unbelief was transubstantiated in his communion with Christ.

Peace be with you.

Deacon Gerry

Disclaimer – Names, times and places are fictional or obscured to protect the privacy of others without distorting the essential truth of the encounter.

References:

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