

Whenever the summer Olympic Games roll around every four years, one of the events that I always find a joy to watch is diving—both men’s and women’s, both springboard and platform. Sometimes, though, I have to say, I’d rather watch the diving competition with the sound turned down. I find that my enjoyment of the event is diminished by the non-stop commentary of the announcers, who are usually retired divers themselves. Before each dive, they describe in detail what it’s going to consist of, and how difficult it’s considered, etc, etc. And immediately after each dive, before the diver is even out of the water, they analyze and critique it, telling us precisely what was done well and what was done poorly, what worked and what failed.

I have a confession to make.

Unless they belly-flop, or hit the platform on the way down, they all look the same to me! They’re all beautiful to me. They all leave me breathless with awe at what a human body can be made to do. But it is next to impossible for me to distinguish the stupendous 9.9s from the not-so-stupendous 6.9s. I simply don’t have the eyes to see the difference.

Eyes to see.

A hard-driving business executive suffers chest pains, and wonders whether this is indeed “the big one.” He rushes off to the Emergency Room, and tests reveal that it’s not a heart attack, but a pre-ulcerous condition that can be best treated by altering his stress-filled work-addicted lifestyle. The man takes this as a warning that could spare him a more serious problem in the future. Is it happy coincidence, or something more?

Eyes to see.

The security of a marriage is threatened by the “seven-year itch,” and the wandering eyes and wandering fantasies that go along with it. But one of the partners is offered an attractive job in another part of the country, and the couple decide to accept it and relocate. Once they’re removed from the immediate sources of temptation, they realize how close they came to disaster, and they resolve to devote renewed enthusiasm to their relationship. Is it a happy co-incidence, or something more?

Eyes to see.

A depressed teenager swallows a dose of sleeping pills that should have been more than enough to complete her suicidal intentions, but through some inexplicable fluke of body chemistry, it isn't, and she's found, and revived, and gets the help she needs. Is it a happy coincidence, or something more?

Eyes to see.

I'm sure that if you and I were to sit down and share the memories of our lives and the lives of those we have loved, we could come up with countless other examples of just being at the right place at the right time, or with the right person, situations where the same question could be asked: Is it a happy coincidence, or something more?

Eyes to see.

In the time just before everything began to happen on a computer, there was a training technique that tested the learner on the content of the text even in the course of reading it. This was done through the strategic placement of blanks in the narrative, blanks that the reader should be able to mentally fill-in if he or she has been paying attention. On one margin of the page was a column that, to the naked eye, looked like a jumble of nonsense characters printed in red ink. But if the reader comes across a blank in the text for which the missing word doesn't come readily to mind, he or she could take a piece of red-tinted transparent plastic and place it over the column of nonsense characters. In the margin, next to the mysterious blank, the correct answer shows through. The red plastic filtered out the nonsense, providing the "eyes" necessary to see the hidden answer. They provided a way of seeing that which would otherwise be invisible.

Eyes to see.

For Christians, the eyes with which we are invited to see are the eyes of faith.

Faith.

The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews tells us this morning that faith is "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." The difference between providence and coincidence is faith. Faith is a way of seeing, a quality of vision that looks at a happy co-incidence of circumstances, but sees—you understand the difference between looking and seeing, right?—sees God actively present in our lives.

Throughout human history, women and men and children have had such faith, such a way of seeing. Abraham and Sarah looked at their advancing age—heck, they weren't advancing in age, they were old—Abraham and Sarah looked at the fact that they were old, but, through the eyes of faith, what they saw was God's ability to fulfill his promise and bless them with a child, an heir born of their own flesh.

Abraham and Sarah's grandson, Jacob, looked at a youth of quarreling with his twin brother, an adulthood of being continually cheated by his uncle, and an old age of being victimized by famine, but through the eyes of faith, what Jacob saw was God beginning to fulfill his promise to make him the father of a great nation, a nation that would bear his own name, the name God had given him: Israel.

Jacob's son Joseph looked at his being sold into slavery by his jealous brothers, but through the eyes of faith, what he saw was God present with him, even while he languished in a dungeon, preparing the way for him to assume such power in Egypt that he answered only to Pharaoh himself.

Generations later, the people of Israel looked at themselves wandering in circles through the desert wilderness, but through the eyes of faith (the faith of some of them, at any rate) what they saw was the land flowing with milk and honey that God had promised to lead them to.

The disciples of Jesus looked at their abandonment of their trades and professions, their only known means of livelihood, in order to follow him, but, through the eyes of faith, they saw the inestimable riches of participating in God's plan for the salvation of the human race and the restoration of the created order.

Christians today look at the changes and chances of this life. Seeing through the eyes of faith is what enables us to see the hand of God equally present in both the happy "coincidences" and the painfully tragic moments of our lives. And we, who live after the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ, and with two thousand years of collective Christian experience behind us, have a tremendous advantage that our ancestors in faith did not have. We have seen the tangible first fruits of God's work of redemption. In the hearing of the word, in the celebration of the sacraments, and in the fellowship of the Christian community, we see this redemption in progress.

The patriarchs and prophets of the old covenant, as the author of Hebrews tells us, "died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth." You

and I, at least, have a clearer and closer vision of our common destination and home than they did. Our eyes of faith enable us to look at personal wealth, and see spiritual danger. Our eyes of faith enable us to look at human need and suffering, and see an opportunity to serve our Lord Jesus by cultivating the virtues of charity and generosity. Our eyes of faith can look at the delay in our Lord's return and see an opportunity to become more fully prepared to give an accounting, as stewards, for that which has been entrusted to us. And our eyes of faith, a few moments from now, will be able to look at bread and wine, made from wheat and grapes and fashioned by human skill—we'll be able to look at these ordinary elements and see the broken body and poured out blood of Jesus, through which you and I become once again the Body of Christ—taken, blessed, broken and given for the life of the world. In every Eucharist, we have an opportunity to not merely look, but to really see. Amen.