

## **Blindness, Not Badness**

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter (Year B)

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Martin Luther King was a great witness to Christianity in many ways, but one way in particular was his ability to distinguish between bad people and blind people. For most of us, we usually combine these two groups and only see bad people. We see all of them as sinful and want nothing to do with them. By distinguishing between bad people and people blind people, however, Dr. King was able to create space for being more understanding and sympathetic toward those who may do bad, but do not do it consciously out of malicious intent. They simply don't know any better at this time. As the younger generations might say, they are not yet 'woke.'

Dr. King's insight came from Jesus' own example, when on the cross, Jesus said, 'Father forgive them; they know not what they are doing.' Reflecting on this passage, in his article 'Love in Action,' Dr. King wrote, "we must recognize that Jesus was nailed to the cross not simply by sin but also by blindness. The men who cried, 'crucify him,' were not bad men but rather blind men. The jeering mob that lined the roadside that led to Calvary was composed not of evil people but of blind people." (*Strength to Love*, 35) He goes on to say that those who killed Socrates, those churchmen who carried out the inquisition and denied science, those patriots who carried out and continue to carry out war, those who owned slaves, and those who promoted segregation, were all decent people, but they were all acting out of extreme blindness.

During this season of Easter, it is amazing to hear the stories of the Risen Lord. After abandoning him and hiding in fear on Good Friday, Jesus never came back to judge, criticize, or scold the disciples for their failures. He didn't avoid them because they were bad. Instead, as in last weekend's Gospel and today's, he kept saying to them, 'peace be with you.' He was able to do this because he knew that they, like the men who crucified him, 'knew not what they were doing.' They were operating out of blindness, not necessarily badness. Now, after the resurrection, they could finally see what they were previously blind to—that Jesus truly is the resurrection and the life. Even Peter in our First Reading from the *Acts of the Apostles*, who denied Jesus three times on Holy Thursday night, could say to those he was preaching to, "I know, brothers, that you acted out of ignorance."

Recognizing that many people operate out of blindness or ignorance is a great skill to develop. This does not mean that we do not hold people responsible for their beliefs and actions or refuse to push for needed change. It does not mean that everyone is always well intentioned. What it does mean, though, is that we leave open the possibility for repentance, conversion, growth, fulfillment, and forgiveness for each other. If we are honest, we ourselves have been blind before in some way. Now that we see, we may appreciate all those who didn't call us evil at the time.

*Humans operate not only out of badness, but much more often out of blindness.* How patient and understanding am I with people who say or do things that I do not agree with? Instead of being angry, upset, and offended with everything that someone says or does to us, let us, like Jesus, say, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing,' and peacefully leave it at that for the moment.