

So I made a few New Year's resolutions and one I've kept so far is to get out and do more things in DC. This past week I saw an exhibit that a friend recommended at the Library of Congress titled, *Rosa Parks: In Her Own Words*.

SCREEN: Rosa Parks photo

For anyone who doesn't know who she was, Rosa Parks worked as a seamstress in a department store in Montgomery Alabama.

But one day in December 1955, she refused to give up her seat on the bus to a white passenger.

She was arrested and charged with violating the town's segregation laws.

This is her arrest photo from that day.

Rosa Parks' action sparked the Montgomery bus boycott, which ultimately put an end to Jim Crow segregation laws throughout our nation.

When Rosa Parks died in 2005, she became the first woman to lie in state at the U.S. Capitol rotunda and was honored by Congress as the first lady of the civil rights movement.

Two things struck me about Rosa Parks from the exhibit.

The first is that looks can be deceiving.

Physically, Rosa was a slight woman - stood just 5 foot 3 inches.

She was very soft spoken and at first glance, someone you might easily dismiss or look past deciding she was unimportant or insignificant.

Not someone you'd look at and say, "*She's going to change the world.*"

But you'd be wrong.

Her whole life had prepared her for that moment.

Where did Rosa's strength come from?

She stood tall and proud because she saw herself through God's eyes.

As a child of God, she had an inherent dignity that transcended race, gender and social status.

Her devout Christian faith gave her immense courage and conviction.

God told her she had a potential to do great things.

The second thing I realized from the exhibit is that Rosa Parks had the support of so many others.

She was the secretary of her local NAACP - a civil rights organization.

She had her family and friends and her church family to lean on.

When times got tough...*and they did*....others were there to lift her up and keep her headed in the right direction.

SCREEN: 20/20 Vision main screen

Today we're continuing our message series titled, 20/20 Vision.

In this series we are being challenged to see ourselves as God sees us.

Our faith teaches us that we are God's children - created in love and redeemed by His Son Jesus.

Which makes us all brothers and sisters - regardless of race, gender or social status.

And if we keep our eyes on Jesus and turn to others for support, we can fulfill our mission as disciples.

The readings today told us how.

The Prophet Isaiah continued the message we heard last week, reminding God's people of their potential for greatness.

Here is what Isaiah wrote:

SCREEN: You are my servant, Israel, through whom I show my glory.

I will make you a light to the nations,

that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth. -Isaiah

When Isaiah wrote this, the Jewish people were at a crossroads.

Their nation had been overrun, the Temple in Jerusalem destroyed, and the people held as captives in Babylon for fifty years.

Having lost everything and feeling abandoned by God,

they were at their lowest point and must have felt like all was lost.

But Isaiah gave them this message of hope.

His goal was to inspire them and remind them who they were.

And it worked!

They returned home, came together and rebuilt.

And for a time, things returned to normal.

But seven centuries later, by the time of John the Baptist,

God's Chosen People needed reminding again.

So John was sent by God to point the way and say "Your salvation is here!"

Last week we heard that Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River by John

and that God the Father announced,

"This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased."

And today we heard John's reaction to the baptism.

Here's what John said of Jesus:

SCREEN: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

He is the one of whom I said,

'A man is coming after me who ranks ahead of me

because he existed before me.'

John referred to Jesus as 'the Lamb of God', but what does that mean?

It's a phrase you hear in every Mass.

As I elevate the host before communion I say:

Behold the Lamb of God; behold him who takes away the sins of the world.

Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.

In Jewish worship 2000 years ago, animal sacrifice was a common practice.

Lambs were sacrificed by the priests in the temple

with the belief that the offering of their blood could atone for people's sins.

When John called Jesus 'the Lamb of God'

he was predicting how Jesus would save God's people.

When Jesus was sacrificed on the cross, the shedding of his blood

took away the sins of all people for all time.

And after he rose from the dead, Jesus and his followers formed a community of believers called the church to show others how to get to heaven. And today, you are being reminded that God wants you to see yourself as he sees you.

God has 20/20 vision.

God sees your potential for greatness.

SCREEN: blank red background

Maybe what I'm saying sounds hard for you to believe.

"Fr. Mike are you saying that I have a potential for greatness? Me???"

You want me to help build God's Kingdom???"

And if you are struggling to believe this, there might be good reasons why.

One reason may be that other people in your life - a parent, a spouse or sibling - have told you that you'll never amount to much.

That you're no good, worthless, a disappointment.

Remember what we've been hearing throughout this series.

God sees every person as his child, created in love.

The words God spoke through Isaiah he speaks to you every day:

"You are my servant, called to be a light for the nations."

So you have a choice to make:

you can listen to others who tell you you aren't important and will never amount to anything;

or you can listen to God.

And when you do, when you listen to God and take on his 20/20 vision, amazing things become possible.

Every time we gather for Mass, we are reminded of who we are.

And after receiving Jesus, the Lamb of God in the Eucharist, we are commanded to 'go forth' and live our faith, to be a light for others.

SCREEN: 20/20 Vision main screen

Here is the takeaway for this series. (hold up)

If you didn't get one of these, you can grab one on your way out.

On here you will find a prayer process you can use every day to help so you can get a clearer vision of where God may be leading you this year.

And beginning next weekend, we will have sign ups for new adult small groups.

Small groups are weekly gatherings of 8-12 adults who pray together, discuss the Sunday readings and message and support one another in the journey of discipleship.

Why is this something you should consider?

The readings today remind us we need other disciples to realize our spiritual potential.

The people of Isaiah's day only succeeded in rebuilding because they came together as God's Chosen People.

John the Baptist had disciples who assisted him in preparing the way for Christ, and as I said, some became Jesus's disciples.

Small groups are based on the same idea - that life is better when we are together with others.

We grow in faith and help others grow.

I've been a member of a men's small group for several years and it has been an enormous help to me and my ministry to you.

If you are feeling bored or stuck in your faith life, be open to something different, be willing to head in a new direction in 2020.

Viewing the Rosa Parks exhibit was a humbling experience.

But I left with a clearer vision of how one person can make a difference.

Today may we see our potential for greatness and live it out every day of this new year. Amen. +