

“The lamp of the body is the eye. If your eye is sound, your whole body will be filled with light; but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be in darkness. And if the light in you is darkness, how great will the darkness be” (Mt 6:22-23).

Saul did not have sound eyes. In Tarsus, he was raised in the Jewish faith. Having a keen intellect, he studied in Jerusalem under the renowned Rabbi Gamaliel. He became a member of the Pharisees. Just as many Pharisees opposed Jesus, Saul also learned to oppose Christianity with a vengeance. Jesus was Jewish and showed us that he was the fulfillment of all the prophets foretold. Saul could not see beyond his pride and prejudice. His eyes were not sound.

From synagogue to synagogue, Saul used to imprison and beat those who believed in Jesus Christ. As he explains, “And when the blood of your witness Stephen was being shed, I myself stood by giving my approval and keeping guard over the cloaks of his murderers” (Acts 22:20). “If your eye is bad, your whole body will be in darkness” (Mt 6:23).

We can often lose sight of the forest by focusing too closely on individual trees. Breathing murderous threats against the disciples of the Lord, Saul wanted to put as many Christians as he could in chains and take them back to Jerusalem for further persecution (Acts 9:2).

“On his journey, as he was nearing Damascus, a light from the sky suddenly flashed around him” (Acts 9:3). To help him see, Jesus took away Saul’s sight. Then Jesus challenged Saul and pierced him to the core by asking, “why are you persecuting me?” (9:4). Everything that Saul had fought so zealously for was wrong. When Saul tried to open his eyes, he was totally blind, he could see nothing. (9:8). This was God’s way of helping to take all of the zeal he had for persecuting the church and convert it into a force for building the church.

The cancel culture we live in is not very forgiving. One’s past or present statements are held up as a litmus test. Fail the test of what others think is right and you might as well resign from whatever position of authority you may have. Once condemned, you are automatically convicted. We hear the echo of the crowds from Good Friday: “Crucify him! Crucify him!” (Lk 23:21).

God always forgives and he often uses our failures as stepping-stones to help others. We need to be careful not to condemn, lest we get in the way of God helping a person to rise from past failures to build the kingdom of God.

When the Lord asked Ananias to lay his hands on Saul and cure the physical blindness, Ananias was quite hesitant. He knew of Saul’s reputation. Ananias was convinced that Saul was evil to the core and beyond any redemption. The Lord helped Ananias to understand. Ananias had a sound eye, so it was easy for the Lord to help him see.

Jesus revealed the forest from the trees. “Go, for this man is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before Gentiles, kings, and Israelites, and I will show him what he will have to suffer for my name” (9:15-16). With the help of God, Ananias helped Saul to physically see again and also to see the beauty of the Christian faith. Saul was baptized and took the name of Paul. All of his past sins, including complicity in the death of Stephen and the persecution of many Christians were totally forgiven. Then, Paul began to boldly proclaim the Good News about Jesus.

With God’s help, Saul the persecutor became Paul the persecuted with “...far greater labors, far more imprisonments, far worse beatings, and numerous brushes with death. Five times at the hands of the Jews [he] received forty lashes minus one. Three times [he] was beaten with rods, once ... stoned, three times ... shipwrecked” (2 Cor 11:23-25). But there was a difference. As a Christian, Paul could willingly forgive others their trespasses. God had first forgiven him. As a disciple of Christ, Paul accepted suffering for he knew that Jesus was asking him to sacrifice in order to build up the church. “If your eye is sound, your whole body will be filled with light.”