

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

Seeing Is Our Responsibility Third Week of Easter Tuesday, May 6, 2014 8:15 AM
Acts 7:51—8:1a; **Jn 6:30-35** (Atheism has one thing right: the God most people have believed in doesn't exist.)

This gospel reading, of course, is intended as irony of sorts. This is in the Book of Signs, the Gospel of John; and the people say, **“What sign can you do?”** when, in fact, that's all he has done his entire ministry, one sign after another, but they couldn't see. This parallels yesterday's reading about the people following him. He says, “You do not follow me because you have seen a sign, but because you had your fill.” **Seeing the sign means perceiving what he does as coming from God, and they don't see that.**

This, of course, connects to the man born blind. When Jesus ends that story, he says to the Pharisees: “If you were born blind, there would be no sin in that; but you claim you can see, and so your sin remains.” The sin here is not seeing Jesus' work as the work of the Father, and that is blameworthy because **we are created to seek the Father, to seek God.** And if we get so convinced that we know what God is about, so much so that **when we see God's work we don't perceive it as God's work**, but see it as something actually wrong or evil, **this is very bad.** And that's where the world is—in a very bad situation. The world doesn't see what God is really about.

Traditionally, **the world created false images of God**, false ideas, that grew and developed, all kinds of malformations and malignancies. Today it's more common, at least for the intellectuals, to simply say there is no God at all, which in a way is true—in a way that's true. **Atheism has one thing right: the God most people have believed in doesn't exist.** That is true—that is true. The God people are looking for, as in this story, that God doesn't exist.

The God who exists, the God who is the ground of all being, the God who cannot not be, that God has been manifesting the works of his heart in the creation since the beginning of creation, and in humanity since the coming of Christ, in a very clear, beautiful, intimate way, and yet remains invisible to so many people. Why? Because **seeing is really our responsibility**. We have to really look. We have to know how to look. We have to want to look, and we have to let go of all the alternatives. So in that way atheism may be something progressing, we are at least letting go of wrong ideas of God. But seeing Jesus as the work of the Father, that's why Jesus said, "If you don't believe me, believe in the works themselves." **Believe in the actions I do**. Believe in what you can see, that proceeds from who I am. Of course, who Jesus is is also part of the whole thing. That's why he says, "**I am the bread of life**; I am the bread of life." When Moses asked this presence at the burning bush, "Who are you? Who shall I say is sending me?" The response was: "**I AM.**" Here Jesus says, "I am the bread of life." "I am" is all God can say.

But this beauty and magnificence of being itself is something we oddly take for granted. We are not astonished by being itself, even by our own being. This doesn't astonish us; we just take it all for granted. And how really deeply peculiar that is! **We will not grow in holiness as long as we take everything for granted**, as long as we imagine that we know what we are looking for, as long as we imagine we can see what we need to see. **Something has to change in the heart of humanity so that we start to really be astonished by the very fact that we are**, and really start seeking with our hearts what is the meaning of this astonishing fact of life.