

GRIST

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Blessed Are the Pure of Heart – They Will See God

When we look at the world with God's "eye of love," we see that: we humans are children of a loving God who invests utmost confidence in us; we are brothers and sisters, not strangers or enemies; all else on the face of the earth is God's gift given to all of us for our common good and our responsible stewardship; the greatest among us is the one who serves the rest; we "find" our lives by "losing" them in love of God and love of neighbor; hostility and hatred are healed through forgiveness, not retaliation and revenge; the world's destiny is decided – it is not in doubt – it is the Kingdom of God in which all tears are wiped away and we rejoice together, as a family around the Banquet Table of the Lord. *James L. Connor, S.J.*

The absolute is available to everyone in every age. There never was a more holy age than ours, and never a less. There is no less holiness at this time, than there was the day the Red Sea parted, or that day in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as Ezekiel was a captive by the river Chebar, when the heavens opened and he saw visions of God. There is no whit less enlightenment under the tree by your street than there was under Buddha's bo tree. There is no whit less might in heaven or on earth than there was the day Jesus said "Maid, arise" to the centurion's daughter, or the day Peter walked on water, or the night Mohammed flew to heaven on a horse. In any instant the sacred may wipe you with its finger. In any instant the bush may flare, your feet may rise, or you may see a bunch of souls in a tree. In any instant you may avail yourself of the power to love your enemies; to accept failure, or the grief of loss; or to endure torture. Purity's time is always now. "Each and every day the Divine Voice issues from Sinai," says the Talmud. *Annie Dillard*

Jesus said, "The light of the body is the eye." Through the mouth we inhale air that is not ownable, air that we share with every being on

earth. And out of our mouths we send words – our personal reshaping of that same communal air. Seeing, I have come to feel, is the very same kind of process. Through our eyes we inhale light and images we cannot own – light and images shared with every being on earth. And out of our eyes we exhale a light or a darkness that is the spirit in which we perceive. This visual exhalation, this personal energizing and aiming of perception, is the eye's speech. It is a reshaping of light as surely as words are a reshaping of air. I therefore feel responsible for my vision. My eye-speech changes the world. *David James Duncan*

Dorothy [Day] was a great believer in what de Caussade called "the sacrament of the present moment." In each situation, in each encounter, in each task before us, she believed, there is a path to God. We do not need to be in a monastery or a chapel. We do not need to become different people first. We can start today; this moment, where we are, to add to the balance of love in the world, to add to the balance of peace. *Robert Ellsberg*

The thing I found is a sequence. It is very simple. First, I looked, and I began to see what was in front of me. Perhaps I looked with more desperateness than a normal person does. At any rate, I really looked, and sometimes I think I really saw, as an artist sees, as if it were the first dawn of my life. Then, inevitably, as will happen to anyone who looks as if for the first time, I noticed that what I saw was amazing, beautiful. The beginning of the sequence, then, is, first you see, then you admire. Next, admiration leads with the same inevitableness to gratitude, next, gratitude leads to humility, for the person who receives much feels grateful and then humble, because he wonders how he can have deserved such extravagant kindness. Humility is naturally followed by a feeling of wonder and adoration toward the source of these miracles, the God who made them and put them there. Next I began to realize that marvelous things to look at are only the beginning of admiration. Not only were extraordinary treasures put before me, but, as in

everyone else, in me were implemented the senses with which I am made able to respond to them and receive them. I am so generously supplied with senses that they complement and almost duplicate each other, so that if one is injured another can serve instead. Besides giving me the incredibly subtle devices of the senses, the Mind of God, who imagined and made us, has added the even more mysterious, and certainly divine gift, the human mind, which widens my understanding and increases my response to things which are in front of me away beyond the reach of the subtle senses. As if this were not enough, the mind has for companion the heart...In recognition of what they have seen, admired, and received [grateful people] finish the sequence. They put themselves and their lives into God's hands to do as He will with them. It seems as if perhaps these are the only people who are civilized enough, in the highest sense, to have been invited to live on the miraculous earth and to wear the miraculous human body.

Katharine Butler Hathaway

When I'm with children I'll ask them, "Tell me what heaven is like. How do you imagine heaven?" If they know that I really want to know the answers to those questions, they will reveal layers of their feelings that they would otherwise conceal. I enjoy that quality in children. I think children see clearly, far more clearly than we grown-ups do. That's why I ask them these kinds of questions. I want them to illuminate my life, my understanding. I mean that, deeply. I know this will sound absurd to some grown-ups, but when I talk with children about their daydreams and fantasies, about heaven, about animals and other gentle aspects of their yearnings, I'm not asking these questions as an ingenuous interviewer. I'm asking because I really want to know the answer. Sometimes I feel I almost conspire with children to imagine a better world than the one we're stuck with. *Jonathan Kozol*

In the winter, seeing a tree stripped of its leaves, and considering that within a little time the leaves would be renewed, and after that the flowers and fruit would appear, I received a vision of the Power and Providence of God, which has never been effaced from my soul. This vision perfectly set me free from the world and kindled in me such a love of God that I could not tell whether it had increased over forty years time. *Brother Lawrence*

We tell stories in crosses: a girl meets a boy; a stranger rides into town; and we tell stories in lines: a knight goes on a quest. Living after the year zero, most Westerners speak of human history as some variation of a line: it began and it will end. We might elaborate on that form, giving it arc, and tangent and the tangle of complication; the end might be a nuclear apocalypse, or the Second Coming, or both. Our lives move similarly, with birth and death serving as points, but few of us would map them so. Our memory moves in circles. We return to those lit, unspeakable moments when we are dissolved in a love. Or we return to lost mornings and evenings so ordinary – red dirt beneath our running feet, smell of dinner, look of sky, sweet face turning – that we didn't know their radiance as they passed. We return to car wrecks, house fires, fights, and what we call, to borrow a term from psychology, trauma. All these moments of saturated time inch and hurl us nearer to this beating thing, Life: this thing which keeps us fascinated and aching for some further home.

Mia Nussbaum

Prayer consists of attention. It is the orientation of all the attention of which the soul is capable toward God. The quality of attention counts for much in the quality of prayer. Not only does the love of God have attention for its substance; the love of neighbor, which we know to be the same love, is made of this same substance. Those who are unhappy have no need for anything in this world but people capable of giving them their attention. The capacity to give one's attention to a sufferer is a very rare thing; it is almost a miracle; it *is* a miracle. Nearly all those who think they have this capacity do not possess it. The love of our neighbor in all its fullness simply means being able to say to him: "What are you going through?" It is a recognition that the sufferer exists, not only as a unit in a collection, or a specimen from the social category "unfortunate," but as a human being, exactly like us who was one day stamped with a special mark by affliction. For this reason it is enough, but it is indispensable, to know how to look at him in a certain way. This way of looking is first of all attentive. The soul empties itself of all its own contents in order to receive into itself the being it is looking at, just as he is, in all his truth. Only one who is capable of attention can do this.

Simone Weil