Fourth Sunday of Lent: 3/19/23—7:30, 9:30 and 11:30 AM

 Earlier this week, my sister Mary sent me this story. ***A woman was flying from Melbourne to Brisbane. Unexpectedly, the plane was diverted to Sydney. The flight attendant explained that there would be a delay, and, if the passengers wanted to get off the aircraft, the plane would re-board in 50 minutes. Everybody got off the plane except one lady who was blind. A man had noticed her as he walked by and could tell the lady was blind because her Seeing Eye Dog lay quietly underneath the seats in front of her throughout the entire flight. He could also tell she had flown this very flight before because the pilot approached her, and, calling her by name, said, 'Kathy, we are in Sydney for almost an hour. Would you like to get off and stretch your legs?' The blind lady replied, 'No thanks, but maybe Max would Like to stretch his legs.' Picture this: All the people in the gate area came to a complete standstill when they looked up and saw the pilot walk off the plane with a Seeing Eye dog! The pilot was even wearing sunglasses. People scattered. They not only tried to change planes, but they were trying to change airlines! Have a great day and remember...THINGS AREN'T ALWAYS AS THEY APPEAR.***That’s what today’s Gospel is all about: the blind man is the one who comes to see, while the Pharisees who are able to see are the ones who are blind.

 One of my favorite songs is Ray Stevens’ Everything Is Beautiful. As you might remember, the refrain goes like this, ***Everything is beautiful in its own way, Like a starry summer night On a snow covered winter's day
And everybody's beautiful in their own way Under God's heaven The world's gonna find the way***. Ray Stevens died back in 1990, and I hope he isn’t spinning in his grave right because of how I sang this song. One of the verses of that song is rather chilling. It goes this way: ***There are none so blind as those who will not see****,* a quote from an eighteenth century British writer by the name of Matthew Henry which finds its roots in the words of the prophet Jeremiah (5:21), in other words, Ray Stevens, Matthew Henry, and the prophet Jeremiah are warning us against a blindness that is chosen and are encouraging us to choose to keep our eyes open.

 What are our chosen forms of blindness? It strikes me that there are three forms of chosen blindness: material, spiritual, and social. By material, I mean how easy it is to be blind to the God-given beauty of creation. That’s why I like to go to the St. Louis Science Center because it blows my mind. For example, did you that the coal we burn in Ameren-UE’s power plants to give us electricity is almost 300 million years old? The same too with regard the gasoline put into our cars. Each drop is about again close to 300 million years old. Would we take those resources so much for granted if our eyes were open to their antiquity and the magnificence of how they both were formed? Again I love the quote by St. Hildegard of Bingen that ***“Every creature is a glittering, glistening mirror of divinity,”*** in other words, of God and God’s love. By spiritual, I mean how easy it is to be blind to the living presence of God with us all the time and especially in our prayer and liturgical practices. A good example of this would be our celebrations of the Mass. I regularly explain at funerals right before beginning the Eucharistic Prayer that every Mass is the Last Supper, that every celebration of the Eucharist is a portal, a doorway, and that, by entering that portal, we Catholics believe that we are standing at the foot of the cross on that First Good Friday, that we are standing at that empty tomb on that first Easter Sunday, that we are face-to-face, heart-to-heart, immediately and directly in contact with the God who loved us so much that he died for us while we were his enemies as St. Paul says in Romans. If our eyes as Catholics were truly open to what every Mass is, how could we ever skip Mass on Sunday or pray it with a ho-hum rushed way? By social, I mean how easy it is to be blind to the other people with whom we share this Earth, yet that other person, no matter if we like him or her or not, is a person for whom Jesus died on that cross and by dying on that cross made that person truly and really our brother or sister.

 As Ray Stevens sings, ***Everything is beautiful in its own way, Like a starry summer night On a snow covered winter's day And everybody's beautiful in their own way Under God's heaven The world's gonna find the way***, that is, if we are ready to let Jesus heal our chosen blindnesses. A good Lenten project for each one of us this week is to search our hearts, with the Holy Spirit’s help, and to ask the Lord to reveal to us our chosen blindnesses, and, even more so, to ask him to heal us of those chosen blindnesses.