

The vision of God is the first thing that happens to a believer. We may surely talk as truly about the vision of God at a baptism as at a funeral. I don't profess to know exactly what our Lord meant by the words he used about little children--"In heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father" (Matthew 18:10) but they suggest that the spirit of an infant enjoys already the vision of God. As a child grows he may still retain a capacity for seeing God that we adults may envy. In the story of the infant Samuel in the temple, that has inspired some of the greatest artists, we find a reflection of the simple wisdom of childhood. The call of God comes to this boy with such clarity and directness that he believes that it must be the old priest speaking. Yet in the darkness it is to him, and not to the old servant of God, that the vision is given.

In mature years, and in a modern scientific civilization, what does it mean to see God? We are inclined to think of this as a mystic experience confined to the very few who have remained detached from the rough-and-tumble of ordinary life and relatively innocent in the sophistication of modern society. We think of them as withdrawn from the world, enjoying their vision of God in some private shrine. But surely the man or woman of faith today is the one who sees God in the events of every day, in the crowded life of home or business, in the experience of both joy and sorrow, in the unexpected encounter, and in the drab routine. We don't have to bypass the material world and seek the vision in some cloudy chancel of the spirit. I believe the promise to the pure in heart is that they shall see God right here and now, and see him in people where others see nothing but perplexity, and in experiences where others see nothing but frustration and despair.

Isn't this the real difference between a life according to the pattern of Christ and a life on the natural level? Both look at the same stream of people that pass us each day--in our homes, in our jobs, in the streets. The one sees simply a mass of human beings; some pleasant, some unpleasant; some good, some bad; some useful, some useless; a few to be chosen as friends; a few to be recognized as enemies; the vast majority just faceless units of our anonymous society. The other, in all this tangle of human contracts, sees God--God in the close relationship of love and friendship, but God also in the difficult person, God in the hostile person, God in the hopeless person, God in the friction as well as the harmony, the image of God reflected even in the blank faces that sway with us on the freeway.

Both look at a picture on the television screen-- there are the marchers, the speakers, the soldiers. Faces flicker in and out of the picture--saintly faces, devilish faces, tired faces, angry faces, scared faces, joyful faces. What are we looking at? One sees simply another trouble-spot on the map of our restless world, and either takes sides or just sighs for an end to it all. The other sees God--God in the plea for justice and freedom, God in the awakened conscience of his people, God in the anguish of difficult decisions, even God in the terrible martyrdom of the meek. For is it not at the heart of the faith to look upon a man hanging helpless on a cross, the victim of an angry mob and a careless people, and to see God?

This leads to the point where the dividing-line is most clearly seen. When suffering strikes, when we--and not someone else--become the victim of accident or malice or what the world calls wretched luck, then we can either see nothing but evil, darkness, and misery; or, in the most profound way of all, we may see God. This is no easy vision, no simple solution for any of us. But we have all known men and women in whom this faith was visible. I have visited them in hospitals, seen them in their homes, or in my study. They have given me more than I could ever give to them. And the unspoken thought in my heart has been, "Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God."

This is the vision of God that many are seeking even though they may not fully realize what their quest truly is. We want to see God in people around us, in the events of today, in our own experiences of both joy and sorrow. We want to see God in those lonely moments when there is silence in our souls. But how,

Well, what are we hearing from the lips of Christ? "Is it 'Blessed are the minds that are able to prove that God exists'?" The Bible tells us to love God with all our minds; we have to use our intellects in our religious quest; but how mistaken are we when we think that someone, or some book, is going to be able to produce the arguments to let us see God. If the vision of God depended on the acceptance of a series of logical propositions, then the brightest minds would have the clearest vision, and the dimwits would have little hope. But it is quite obvious that the vision of God has been shared in this world on a quite different plan. Some of the greatest minds alive or dead have been believers--and multitudes of the very simplest. The intellect alone can never be the avenue of the vision of God.

What then? "Blessed are the temperamentally religious for