

# SEEING WITH NEW EYES . . .

Challenges and change are scary at any age. Just ask my grandsons who began kindergarten this fall. Their new school was much bigger than their preschool and they only knew a few of their classmates. It was going to be a full day not just a few hours and there was so much that was new to adjust to. Even things that were meant to help, like having an 8<sup>th</sup> grader sit with them in church provoked fear. "He was so big and I'm just a little guy," one said. Luckily they had each other and a very caring staff to help them through the first days of getting settled in. Their uncle, who attended the same school some 40 years ago recalls fearing his afternoon ride home wasn't coming to take him home when it was a few minutes late on the first days of school. When he tried to explain his upset to me when he got home, I told him he could always call and I'd come pick him up. "I wanted to," he told me, "but I wasn't tall enough to reach the door bell" to get back into the school. Like I said, challenges and change are hard.

We know the challenges we are dealing with but seldom are aware of the struggles other people face. Being open to this should make us more compassionate.

Sadly we rarely take the time to find out. Somehow we expect others to see things from our perspective and when they don't we tend to make judgments—usually negative--about them even before getting to know them. I had a social work intern once who wanted to spend part of her time at the food pantry. She came from a rural/suburban area and expected to have little in common with those who came seeking food. She came to me the next day and told me she met a single mom struggling to stay in school and make life better for her and her child. "That could have been my sister," she told me. Something changed in her that day and has enabled her to see people through a broader lens.

The working poor are especially courageous, I believe, though few recognize that. Imagine having to get up long before dawn to wake, feed, and dress children, walk them to day care, take two buses to get to a minimum wage job, and then repeat the same process, getting home just in time to feed the children and get them to bed, and doing the very same thing the next day. It would be nice to have a car to get around, but usually there's no money

for that. Health care comes from the local clinic but it's hard to get an appointment after job hours and taking time off to care for a sick child, go to the doctor or a food pantry, or keep an appointment with a child's teacher might just lead to losing the job. And every change in income or life circumstances needs to be reported to Job and Family Services to keep the Medicaid and SNAP food benefits that help stretch the budget for them just to survive. The paperwork required is often overwhelming even to persons with advanced degrees. Being poor is very hard work with few opportunities to get ahead. Most parents I know are willing to do

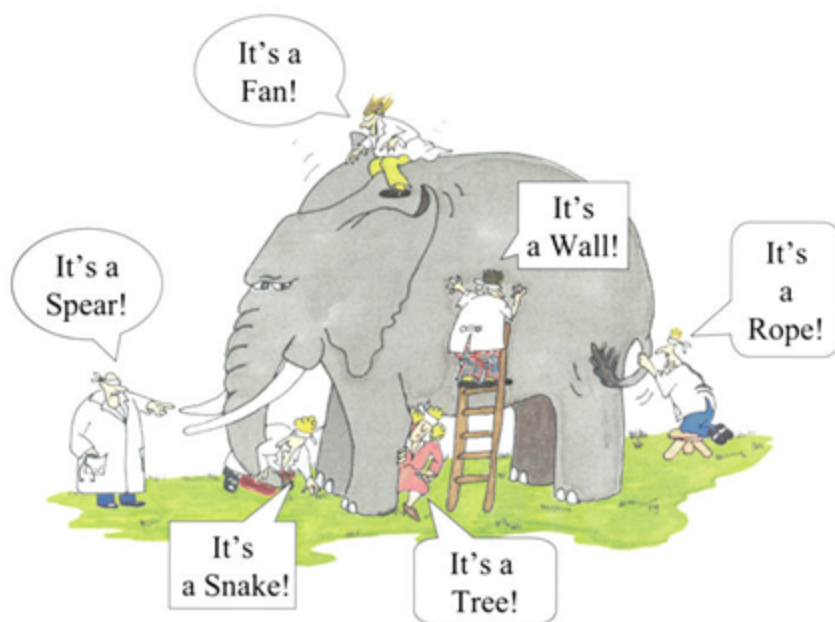
this so their children have an easier future than they do.

As I work with immigrants and refugees and help them negotiate the hurdles of getting settled in a new country, I am amazed by their openness and resilience in dealing with challenges and change. I can't even imagine what it must be like to have to exist in the midst of daily war, death, scarcity, hunger, fear, prejudice, and injustice. Just surviving would be a major accomplishment. And taking the risk to leave everything behind and undertake the dangerous journey to a

better life would call for superhuman power. How would I go on after seeing my friends and relatives being slaughtered or continue the journey when my strength was depleted, my belly growling, my children crying for food, and unknown dangers ahead? I think I'd probably give up. But they don't. Their faith in God carries them through. When I get frustrated trying to explain things one more time and impatient at how long it takes for them to assimilate, God reminds me to look with different eyes and I am humbled and ashamed.

One thing I know for sure is that we are called to love and see the face of Jesus in each other. Usually we are like the blind men and the elephant. We see only from our own perspective. As followers of Jesus we are challenged to expand our view and realize that we all are truly brothers and sisters. Like my grandsons who got through the changes and challenges of their young lives with each other and their loving teachers we are called to stretch ourselves to be there with and for each other.

— Angela Anno



“Working for a just distribution  
of the fruits of the earth and human labor  
is not mere philanthropy.  
It is a moral obligation.”  
— Pope Francis

