

The Importance of What is Seen



The above puppies are four days old. It may be difficult for the reader to see them, but the puppies cannot see at all, so are very vulnerable. They identify their mother by scent and feeling to obtain the life-giving drinks they need. She can see them, and will try to protect and care for them, even when they all move in different directions. Soon they will see for themselves and come to know what they are seeing, including one another, their mother and themselves.

Last month I wrote about the importance of what is unseen. This month I shall explore the importance of what we do see, human beings, animals and nature. I do not wish to compare seeing with unseeing, but rather to affirm the importance of all God's creation, seen and unseen.

Seeing is usually the way we recognise others, but we also use, especially when we are blind or have poor vision, hearing, touching, and perhaps, like the puppies, even smelling to identify others.

When we look around us as we walk down a street or sit in a waiting room or bus, we may ignore or just glance briefly at the people who pass by or sit beside us. Alternatively, we may decide to see others as people created by God,

as we are, and so in a sense, as our brothers or sisters. This does not mean that we stare at them or try to force them to relate with us, but rather that we surround them with God's love, and recognise God's presence in them.

God's love, as I understand it, does not demand a response from the one being loved. Instead, God's love allows a freedom for all to respond or not, as they wish. This means that our offers of friendship and love can be ignored, rejected, or accepted with gratitude. It is not a controlling relationship we are desiring, but one that respects and reverences the other. It can be quite uplifting when someone acknowledges us as a fellow human being, and responds in a positive way to our caring smile.

Seeing others reminds us that we belong to the world of which we are a part. In the first instance we are all created and seen by God, surrounded by God's love and have something of God's presence in our lives. This unites us with all other human beings and also the non-human part of creation we see around us. We are all bound together as members of God's creation. I notice that if I arrive late to put my two hens into their house and give them their evening meal, they have already gone in, but on seeing me they immediately come out again, and squat down for me to pick them up and put them back where they have just been. This means they and I can share the enjoyment of being seen, recognised and felt.

It is interesting that after 9 months, on October 21st, 2025, our Prime Minister, Anthony Albanese, was able to have a face to face meeting sitting next to the President of USA, Donald Trump, in the White House. And after 500 years, King Charles, head of the Church of England, and Pope Leo were able to come together on October 23, 2025, and publicly pray at a service in the Sistine Chapel, offering a visible sign of unity and reconciliation between Christians. In both cases connections could have been made in other ways, but being physically together where they were, seemed to achieve much more.

We might now ask, how do we see ourselves? Each day we look in the mirror and see part of ourselves. Other people can see more of us, like the back of our head! If this is so, do we need to carefully relate with others to know not only them, but to better know ourselves?

When it comes to our relationships with nature, there are stirred by a gentle

breeze, will capture our attention and fill us with peace. Also I find that stopping to look at the beauty of a rose, a Noisy Miner bird feeding from the red blooms of a bottlebrush bush or a lizard in our garden nodding its head in my direction when I speak to it, gives me much pleasure.

At the resurrection of Jesus, what is unseen and what is seen is mixed up. Unseen angels were seen, a dead body was not seen, a risen body was not recognised, but thought to be a gardener in one story, and a stranger walking along a road in another. Jesus' friends saw his resurrection body and even heard him talk, but they did not at first recognise him.

What and how, do we see when we look at a person, animal or plant? Do we look carelessly or carefully, taking time. It can be difficult sometimes to see and recognise God in other people, and even in wriggly 4 day old puppies. Rowan Williams in "Being Human" page 65, suggests that difficulty, "imposes the willingness to believe that there is more to work on". So accepting the importance of what is seen, and taking time to relate with it, may enable us to deepen our recognition of God in all creation, and then reveal more of God's love which is present in both the seen and unseen in God's world.

*Sister Helen CSC
November 2025*