

The Thirtieth Sunday of Ordinary Time

(Year B)

<i>First Reading</i>	Jeremiah 31:7-9
<i>Response</i>	The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.
<i>Psalm</i>	Psalm 126:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6
<i>Second Reading</i>	Hebrews 5:1-6
<i>Gospel Acclamation</i>	Our Savior Jesus Christ destroyed death and brought life to light through the Gospel.
<i>Gospel</i>	Mark 10:46-52

The Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time for Year B brings us back once again to the Gospel of Mark 10. In this case we're looking at a little bit of a shorter pericope, a shorter episode; it's Jesus' encounter with the blind man named Bartimaeus and his healing of the man. So let's turn to Mark 10:46-52 and see what Jesus says to this man, how he heals him and how it connects to the Old Testament readings for today.

And they came to Jericho; and as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great multitude, Bartimae'us, a blind beggar, the son of Timae'us, was sitting by the roadside. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent; but he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" And Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; rise, he is calling you." And throwing off his mantle he sprang up and came to Jesus. And Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" And the blind man said to him, "Master, let me receive my sight." And Jesus said to him, "Go

your way; your faith has made you well." And immediately he received his sight and followed him on the way.¹

Okay, lots of elements in this beautiful story that are worth highlighting. The first one is just the name of the man. It's interesting here, he's called Bartimaeus, and Mark translates that for you by telling you that he was the son of Timaeus. This is another kind of clue that Mark's gospel is written to a Gentile audience, probably in Rome but definitely one that's not familiar with Aramaic expressions and their meanings, because any person who is Aramaic would know that Bartimaeus means son of Timaeus because the Aramaic word *bar* means son. This was a frequent way of identifying people at a time when there were no last names. You would use a patronymic, the name of their father, the name of their daddy, and so you would say Jesus son of Joseph or just Barjoseph, like Simon son of Jonah or something like that. So what could happen is you would actually eliminate the first name and just use the person's patronymic, Bartimaeus, as a way of identifying them. So for example, when I moved back to Houma where I grew up, very common people say, oh you're Ricky's boy, which is basically an English way of saying son of Ricky. In Aramaic you could do the same thing, Bartimaeus, oh you're Timaeus' boy, you're the son of Timaeus. That's basically what the name means, it becomes a kind of a nickname that was common in those days. The other way to identify somebody, by the way, was to say where they were from. So you'd either say who their daddy was or you would say what town they were from. So you'd see Jesus son of Joseph, you know, or Jesus of Nazareth. Those are the ways of identifying people when they had so many of the same names.

In this case then, what we get is Bartimaeus, which means son of Timaeus, who is a blind beggar living near Jericho. So we'll see here that he has a physical impediment, he can't see, and this physical impediment, which was often the case in antiquity, led him into poverty, it led him into living a life of poverty as a beggar. Maybe his father has died, maybe he has no family relations, but in some way, shape or form he ends up on the outskirts of society as a blind beggar, literally living on the outskirts of Jericho, you know, outside the city limits so to speak. And as

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible citations/quotations herein are from *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*. New York: National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 1994.

he's sitting by the roadside and he hears Jesus of Nazareth is coming by, he begins to shout and cry out. Notice what he says here, a second element, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." What does that mean, Son of David? Well on the one hand, it can mean a member of the royal family, but more specifically in context it probably alludes to Jesus' messianic identity, because Son of David was one of the titles that would be used for the Messiah, the long-awaited King of Israel. So if Bartimaeus has heard rumors that Jesus is in fact the long awaited Messiah, in effect what he's doing is making a kind of messianic confession of faith in Jesus by calling him the Son of David and asking him to have mercy on him in his blindness. Now it's interesting here, the crowds, what do they do? Well they continue to marginalize Bartimaeus by saying "shut up man, stop crying out, stop bothering the teacher, be quiet." Bartimaeus' response to that opposition is to just shout louder. He's persistent, he doesn't stop. He continues to ask Jesus for the mercy he desires, for the healing he longs for, and so Jesus stops his procession and he instructs his disciples to call him.

Now this is a third element that's interesting here. When it says, "'Call him.' And they called the man and they said, 'Take heart, he is calling you,'" you get three uses of the verb *kaleō*, which is the word for to call. Now why does that intrigue me? Well on the one hand, it emphasizes Jesus' initiative, right, that Jesus is inviting Bartimaeus to come to him, despite his social marginalization, despite his physical handicap, despite the fact that the crowds don't seem to regard him with any kind of esteem. They just kind of toss him aside as if he's a worthless person just because he's blind and poor. Jesus doesn't do that. Jesus calls him, he invites him to him. The other reason I think it's interesting is because the word *kaleō* is the root for *ekklésia*, right. *Ekklésia* is the Greek word for church. When we hear the word church in English we think first primarily of a building and then of an institution, but in Greek, the root of *ekklésia*, *kaleō*, literally means to call out, to call someone. So the emphasis that Mark puts on the word call on his account of this encounter I think is at least suggestive of the *ekklésia*, the ecclesial dimension. What does Jesus do? How does he gather his church to himself? Well he calls people, he takes the initiative, he invites us into a relationship with him. So he says, "Call the man" and they say, "Rise, he is calling you." So throwing off his cloak he springs up and he comes to Jesus and Jesus says this question, "What do you want me to do for you?" Which again it might seem a little rude or like stating the obvious, you know, from the blind man's perspective. You can almost imagine him saying, if

it was the 80s, “duh,” right. “I'm blind, I'm a beggar, you're a miracle worker, you're the Messiah, how about you heal me? How about you give me back my sight?” Right!? “Of course that's what I want for you to do for me.”

But I think there's actually an element of real importance here, which is that Jesus wants the man to ask him. He wants to make his petition explicit. He wants to make it clear, and you'll see Jesus do this elsewhere in the Gospels, like in the Gospel of John. He'll say things like “do you want to be healed?” It almost seems obscured as a question, but this is part of Jesus' pedagogy. It's part of his method of teaching, always to throw the initiative back on to us, to throw the response. He wants us to respond to his call. He wants us to be engaged in whatever healing or prayer or discipleship he's calling us into. There's no passivity when it comes to Jesus. He always demands that we make a decision, that we be engaged, that we ask. And so he says, “What do you want me to do for you?” And the blind man says, “Master, let me receive my sight.”

Okay, so another interesting dimension here is the address that the man gives. Bartimaeus calls Jesus master. Now it's a little unfortunate here that the Revised Standard Version translates this as master, because the Greek word for master is actually *despotēs*. We get the word despot from that. It's the idea of a slave master. But that's not the word Bartimaeus actually uses here. The Greek word here is *rabbouni*, which is an Aramaic version of Rabbi, which more properly translated means my teacher. The reason I bring up that difference is because *rabbouni* has a personal dimension to it, it literally means my teacher. So by calling Jesus *rabbouni*, he isn't just saying master, he's saying my teacher, I want to see. So he's affirming a personal relationship with Christ. So it's not just hey you're the Messiah, you're the king objectively, but subjectively he is putting himself under Jesus' tutelage, he's saying my teacher, my Rabbi, I want to see. There's an implicit faith in that title of Rabbi or *rabbouni*. Jesus responds to that and says, “Go on your way; your faith has made you well.” Then, finally, Mark's favorite expression immediately, *euthus* in Greek. Immediately, immediately, immediately. We've been walking through this gospel all these weeks now and you see Mark over and over again say Jesus immediately did and immediately he did that and immediately he did this. *Euthus*, *euthus*, *euthus* in Greek. Right here, same thing. Immediately he received his sight and then he followed him on the way.

Last element there, followed him on the way. What does that mean? Well *hodos* in Greek is just the word for a path or a way or a road. So on one level what does that mean? Jesus was going on the road out of Jericho, he meets Bartimaeus, he heals him, and now Bartimaeus starts to walk with Jesus. He follows Jesus. He becomes a disciple of Jesus. However, there's also a deeper possible meaning when you remember that the word the way was one of the earliest names for the church in the Book of Acts. So in Acts 4 it speaks about Jerusalem authorities persecuting those who belong to the way, *hodos* in Greek, same thing, the path. This was just one of the terms that were used for the church. Sometimes called church, sometimes called the way, sometimes it's called the Nazarene, sometimes Christians. There are all these different names, and in this case, though it's an evocative term, because if you are asking Jews about the way or the road, another connotation would be the road through the desert at the time of the exodus, when God made a path in the wilderness. So there are two ways in the Bible. There's the way or the path of the exodus under Moses, and then there's the way or the path of the new exodus under Jesus. So we've mentioned before this theme of the new exodus in the Gospel of Mark at different points, like Jesus going out into the desert for 40 days at the opening of the gospel, just like Israel was in the desert at the time of the exodus. We saw Jesus talk about the Son of Man giving his life as a ransom for a multitude of people, just like God ransomed the multitude 600,000 Israelites from slavery to Pharaoh at the time of the exodus. So you got all these exodus images swirling around beneath the surface of Mark's gospel. Well here's one more. The new exodus, the new path, the new way that we're all called out of bondage and called to journey into is the way of discipleship. It's the way of following the Lord. It's having our eyes opened so we can see Jesus and also being equipped by being able to see to travel, right. It's hard to travel if you're blind. It's hard to walk if you're blind. You need someone to guide you, you need someone to assist you, but if you can see you can walk the path. So God here is opening the eyes of this man so he can now become a disciple, a follower of Jesus.

Okay, so that's the Gospel, it's short but it's rich and beautiful, packed with many words and images that are very, very rich in allusions to the Old Testament. Which brings us back to the Old Testament reading for today, which is from Jeremiah 31. Which just happens to be a prophecy of the new exodus, right. So no coincidences here. In Jeremiah 31:7-9, the prophet describes the exiles returning to the land of Jerusalem, returning to Zion the city of Jerusalem, returning to the promised land

after being exiled to Babylon. Throughout the prophet's, the return from exile to Zion is depicted as a kind of new exodus. So just as at the time of Moses the 12 tribes were in exile in Egypt, they journey through the desert on a path and came back to the promised land, so too the prophets will speak about the return from exile in Babylon to the promised land as a kind of new exodus, where the people of God will be brought back to the land; although in some of the oracles of the prophets you'll get the sense that it's much greater than just the return from Babylon than the two tribes coming back to Jerusalem, but that all the tribes spread throughout the whole earth, who've been scattered since the time of the Syrian exile in the Eighth Century B.C., are also going to come home to Zion and to the city of God. So in Jeremiah 31:7-9 we get a prophecy of the new exodus and this is what it says:

For thus says the LORD: "Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, 'The LORD has saved his people, the remnant of Israel.' Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and her who is in travail, together; a great company, they shall return here. With weeping they shall come, and with consolations I will lead them back, I will make them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble; for I am a father to Israel, and E'phraim is my first-born.

So what's this prophecy about? Number one, it's about the future age of salvation when God's going to save his people. Number two, it's about a return from exile, coming back out of exile and home to the promised land. Number three, it includes a prophecy of who's going to be part of that remnant of Israel, and who stands out prominently here? I'm going to gather among them the blind and the lame. So there's your link with the gospel. So just as Jeremiah prophesied that the blind would follow the way and the path home to Jerusalem and to Zion, so too now Jesus heals blind Bartimaeus, so that Bartimaeus can follow Jesus. Not to the earthly Jerusalem, he's just in Jericho, and he's not that far from Jerusalem anyway, but to the new Jerusalem, to the new Zion., to the new heavens and the new earth that were spoken of by the prophets and that were tied to the age of salvation, which Jesus is going to inaugurate through his passion, his death and his resurrection. That's the ultimate exodus that Jesus is going to carry out. The restoration of Bar-

timaeus, and Bartimaeus following him on the road out of Jericho is a kind of earthly sign of that supernatural exodus, that Jesus calls every member of the church to participate in, to walk in, as they walk the path to the new Jerusalem.

In this case, the Psalm for the day is a really beautiful Psalm, it's Psalm 126. It's a very famous Psalm because it actually describes the lamentations and the desire of the exiles to return home, to go back to Jerusalem. So this is what it says. It describes the restoration to Zion, the return from exile as a kind of past fact and sings a hymn of praise to God for it. So this is what it says:

When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion,
we were like those who dream.
Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with shouts of joy;
then they said among the nations,
"The LORD has done great things for them."
The LORD has done great things for us;
we are glad.
Restore our fortunes, O LORD,
like the watercourses in the Negeb!
May those who sow in tears
reap with shouts of joy!
He that goes forth weeping,
bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy,
bringing his sheaves with him.

So it's got a beautiful image of coming home to the promised land at the harvest time, right, bringing in the fruits of the harvest, bringing in the sheaves is this image for return to Zion, return to Jerusalem.

Okay, so that's all the passages for today from Scripture itself. I'd like to close with two texts from the living tradition of the church, from two of the church fathers, which take that kind of literal First Century Jewish context and Jewish meaning but draw out a deeper spiritual significance of the healing of Bartimaeus. So in this case I'd like to look at two quotes, one more ancient, one more modern. The first is

from The Venerable Bede, he's one of the doctors of the church, he's at the end of the patristic era, early Middle Ages. In his commentary he says this about Bartimaeus:

Could He who was able to restore sight be ignorant of what the blind man wanted?

Think here about Jesus' question, you know, what do you want me to do?

His reason then for asking is that prayer might be made to Him; He puts the question, to stir up the blind man's heart to pray... Therefore let us also imitate him, let us not seek for riches, earthly goods, or honours from the Lord, but for that Light, which we alone with the Angels can see, the way to which is *faith*...²

So you might recall from a previous video, I talked about the treasures of wisdom and the wealth of wisdom and how Christ and the Old Testament call us to put wisdom above all earthly treasures and all earthly possessions. Here Venerable Bede is kind of doing the same thing with the story of Bartimaeus, and saying that we, like Bartimaeus, are often blinded to the value and the light of faith. So we need to beg God, we need to ask the Lord, we need to pray for the gift of sight, to be able to see the truth, to know the truth so we can follow Jesus more faithfully. Beautiful reflection.

Then much more recently, the first encyclical letter of Pope Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, called *The Light of Faith*, which was kind of a neat encyclical because not only was it Pope Francis' first encyclical, but half of it was drafted by Pope Benedict and half by Pope Francis. They kind of co-authored it together, although it was published under Pope Francis' authority at the beginning of his pontificate. At the beginning of this beautiful letter on faith, in paragraph four, the Holy Father has this to say about the need, the particular need, in our day and time for the light of faith. This is what he says:

² Bede, cited in Thomas Aquinas, *Catena Aurea on Mark*, 10:52

“There is an urgent need, then, to see once again that faith is a light, for once the flame of faith dies out, all other lights begin to dim. The light of faith is unique, since it is capable of illuminating every aspect of human existence. A light this powerful cannot come from ourselves but from a more primordial source: in a word, it must come from God. Faith is born of an encounter with the living God who calls us...

Think here of Bartimaeus.

...and reveals his love... Transformed by this love, we gain fresh vision, new eyes to see... Faith, received from God as a supernatural gift, becomes a light for our way, guiding our journey through time. It is this light of faith that I would now like to consider, so that it can grow and enlighten the present, becoming a star to brighten the horizon of our journey at a time when mankind is particularly in need of light.³

Beautiful words there from Pope Francis. I think that the Holy Father is correct there to see that there's a real urgency for the gift of the light of faith to be given to humanity today. If you think of the human race today in terms of not physical blindness, but spiritual blindness and spiritual sight, how many of us are spiritually blind, and how many of us are spiritually able to see? So with these final reflections, I think we can all kind of see ourselves in blind Bartimaeus. We are like blind beggars. We are blind to the light of faith and often starving for the truth of the gospel and so like blind Bartimaeus we need to ask the Lord for the light of faith, for the gift of faith, not just be given to us but to be given to our families, given to those we love., to be given to everyone in the world who still walks in the darkness of not knowing who Jesus is as the Son of David, who is come into the world to have mercy on us.

³ Pope Francis, Encyclical *Lumen Fidei* 4