

Thirtieth Sunday of the Year – October 25, 2015

Jeremiah 31:7-9; Hebrews 5:1-6; Mark 10:46-52

The Gospel presents us with the mandate of Jesus namely, the commandment to love. Jesus was asked which the greatest commandment in the Jewish Law was and he gave not one but two commands, though the two are really one: Love God and love your neighbor. If we believe in God, then we must live by these commandments. But this makes us confident and happy. We know in Jesus that to know that God is love, and those we should respond to him in love. For us he is a source not of anxiety, but of great comfort, great hope, and great consolation. To love God is to acknowledge the source of meaning and purpose of our existence, to embrace the truth, to wonder and admire at all that he has made. Believing in God does not make us anxious or worried but encourages us in our lives. He guides us in the decisions we must take. He challenges us to love one another so that we bring happiness not only in our lives but in the lives of our neighbors. He gives us comfort when we are sad, gives peace when desperate and hope when in trouble. He gives us joy and blessings as we live our life according to his will. In the first reading God says to the remnant of Israel that he will bring them back, comfort them and lead them to the streams of water. He will be a Father to them and take care of them. The second reading we hear of Jesus the priest forever, who can sympathize with us in our weakness. He offers sacrifice of expiation for our sins. In the Gospel we have the healing of Bartimaeus, the blind beggar to receive the new light and vision from Jesus to be his disciple.

In our First Reading we heard the prophecy of Prophet Jeremiah revealing that a remnant of loyal and faithful Israelites will one day return to their homeland from all the places to which they were scattered by warfare and exile. Here the prophet is speaking about those who suffered at the time of the collapse of the northern kingdom of Israel in the sixth century B.C. Purified through their exile; they were the new Israel, faithful to God. The prophet told them that they had brought on themselves all the pain and sufferings because of their disloyalty to their kind God who had given them the Promised Land to be their home. Through suffering, the people humbled themselves and turned to God with sincere repentance. The reading is a hymn of praise and rejoicing because of what God is going to do for his people. In this joyful moment, the people sang aloud with gladness, displaying endless echoes of thanksgiving to God who had delivered the weak, the lame, those with children and those in labor. These were the ones who had received spiritual sight, they knowing and understanding the righteousness of the Lord that delivers salvation. The prophet tells them that by God's grace the people will experience many blessings. The presence of mothers and mothers to be is a sign of hope for a

brighter and more secure future. Joy will replace their tears which they shed when they were taken into exile.

In our Second Reading, we heard that while every high priest is chosen from among mortal human persons, their own people. But he is chosen and appointed by God himself to be in charge of things in relationship with God. He is to offer sacrifices on behalf of people as they too must offer sacrifices for sins because they all are subject to human weakness. Since they were weak and prone to sin, they were able to be patient with sinners. The Letter reminds that a high priest is not appointed by a person himself or in any way appointment by man. It is a calling from God, just as Aaron was called. Equally, Jesus, although he is God-man did not seek glory by elevating himself as the high priest. It was the Heavenly Father who appointed Him when he said to Jesus, "You are My Son, today I have begotten you and am pleased with you." Elsewhere, He said, "You are a Priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek." Christ is our High Priest, our intermediary with God. He understands our weaknesses because he is also human for our sake. Yet the call of the master is indeed great and behaves as one who has come to serve and not to be served. Jesus is called here as the high priest because of his relationship with his Father. By his glorification and entrance into the eternal sanctuary he fulfills his vocation as the eternal High Priest.

The gospel passage of today is actually the last miracle story recorded in Mark. It comes at end of a long section where Jesus is forming his disciples. Jesus was already instructing them on the nature of the discipleship and his own identity. Throughout these narratives the disciples appear to be blind as to who Jesus really was and what it means to accept the demands he had made from them. Jesus indeed points out to the necessary abilities of the Christian disciple: to hear and understand the Word of God and to share the message with others. All this now is contrasted with the healing of Bartimaeus. It is very unusual to have a name given to a person Jesus heals. The action of the story is begun by Bartimaeus himself who heard that Jesus was near. He cried out to him using an Christological title, Son of David. We are not told whether the man understood the meaning of the title but he was able to draw the attention of Jesus. There was the two-stage healing of a blind man. This story clearly indicated the gradual opening of the disciples' eyes as to the true identity and mission of Jesus. The section ends with the healing of the blind man which is not merely coincidence. At this juncture Jesus is now very near to Jerusalem. In fact, Jericho, which lies to the north-east, is on the way to Jerusalem. This has great significance for the miracle story to follow. This miracle speaks of the discipleship and the meaning of spiritual blindness that was present in the disciples and the followers of Jesus.

The blind beggar on the road side cried out the words, Son of David has Mercy on me. The Gospel does not tell us how this blind man got this unique messianic title of Jesus. He must have heard stories about him as a marvelous healer. For him this was a great opportunity, a moment of hope to get him healed. The disciples and the crowd think it was unseemly for a lowly beggar who was also blind, bothering Jesus the Rabbi. In a similar way they thought that children should not come and disturb Jesus when he was tired. After all, Bartimaeus was only a poor beggar. He could not and should not disturb an important person like Jesus who is respected as the rabbi. But Bartimaeus was not being put off so easily. He tried to draw the attention of Jesus by calling out even more loudly, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." But the people around told him to be quiet. Jesus by now had already heard the shouting of the blind beggar and stopped. He overruled the disciples and called the blind man to him and asked him what exactly he wanted Jesus to do for him. The people would have told the beggar that the master was calling him and he must take courage. He was sure to give him a special gift, perhaps some alms for him to live. So they brought the man to the presence of Jesus.

It was an interesting moment of response of Bartimaeus to the call of Jesus, who threw aside his cloak and came forward to meet the master. Many commentators think this action should be understood more symbolically than literally. It represented Bartimaeus casting off his old life in order to take up a new life of discipleship. Part of the requirement for being a disciple of Jesus was to give up possessions which this blind beggar quickly does. This indeed was the moment of hope for him. He seemed to be sure of receiving a great gift namely his sight. So Bartimaeus gives Jesus very simple answers that he may have his vision and that he may see. This was a very simple question and Jesus receives a humble and simple reply. It is the type of Christian prayer, a prayer of petition with the understanding, ask and you shall receive with the belief that we receive whatever we ask in faith God will give it to us. Jesus responds to him with affection and says that he is going to receive his sight and new sight is given to him. Once the blind man receives his sight, we are told that he went following him all the way, or in other words, he became a disciple of Jesus. No attention has been given at all to the miracle of curing the blindness. All the attention is on Bartimaeus and his transformation into a disciple of Jesus.

Mark in the gospel passage wants to show his audience an irony. At the beginning of the story we saw a blind, an impoverished beggar sitting by the roadside and asking for help. He now reaches out to Jesus. Jesus does show a contrast here between his chosen disciples and the new disciple in the blind beggar. While his handpicked disciples were not physically blind and had seen Jesus in action for

a long time they were spiritually blind as they did not understand who Jesus really is or what following him really means. They had never used the title Son of David at any time while addressing Jesus. On the other hand the lowly blind beggar seems to know who Jesus really is even before he gets back his physical sight and almost immediately undergoes the kind of transformation that makes him a faithful disciple of Jesus. He became a person with new spiritual vision along with his physical vision and he chose to be with Jesus as his disciple. Thus at the end of the story, we have a man who can see, has vision, who knows very clearly where he is going and where he should be going. No longer is he a beggar but greatly enriched by that vision and now actively walking with Jesus. No longer is he beside the road but now on the road, on the Way with his healer. Jesus is the Way: Jesus is Truth and Life. For the blind man it represents a situation where he casts off his old life in order to take up a new life of discipleship.

Jesus is the Son of David, the Messiah so much expected. This blind man, seated there on the side of the road, understood it. Certainly, he did not see what Jesus had previously done. He did not see the multiplication of bread and fishes and the recovery of so many bags of leftover scraps, nor did he see the number of sick persons whom numerous crowds have brought to Jesus, the Son of God becomes a Man. But first he believed in that which some people who surrounded him said about this Man of whom he had heard so much and whom they praised as a man of very great goodness. He lived first this mere human faith, this faith which consists of confidence in another who is different from us, who is our neighbor and whom God himself placed on our road. The blind man knew that this man who passed by was Jesus of Nazareth, the healer. Hearing him passing by, the simple human faith of Bartimaeus was transformed into a divine faith, a faith which transcends all things, a faith which dares all, one so strong that challenges complacent people. He professed his faith in the Son of God and called him the Savior of the world. Bartimaeus was not afraid, although several attempted to silence him. Mark tells us that even when they tried to silence him he shouted even more. His faith inspired him to ask from the Lord what he wanted him to do. Jesus respected and accepted this faith and did the healing.

The request of the blind man is a model prayer for us: the Christian Prayer, the Prayer of Petition. We ask the Lord in faith for something we need and the Lord will grant it to us. Perhaps Jesus had seen the blind beggar several times as he went about preaching and he must have been busy collecting alms from people. Only when he opened himself in faith and asked the Lord for healing did he receive that gift and the greater gift to be his disciple. Like Bartimaeus we too may be busy sometimes collecting petty alms and paltry donations and have not collected the real graces from the Lord. This episode is a summary of the

Christian's life and pilgrimage. While physical sight is desirable, spiritual sight is an absolute necessity for our salvation. In order to have this spiritual sight we must pray to Jesus and say Lord, my Teacher, let me see again. Only when we receive spiritual sight, we come to know and understand that "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God." As Christians, we must have our eyes opened to the meaning of life, if we are to undergo a radical conversion experience which gives new direction to all we are and do. He believed in the word of God which was revealed to him internally that this man was the Son of God and was healed. We also, who believe in Jesus, Bread of Life, Savior of the world come to give us his divine life, can be saved by this Eucharist which we celebrate and receive Jesus who can make us see new things in life. Let us pray that today's Word of God will touch the heart of those who have been spiritually blind so they will find the strength in Christ to walk away from what destroys the faith. Let us also pray this week for the grace of God to shine on those in need so their eyes may be opened and remain opened to faith and love of Jesus the master.

A 92-year-old man, who was fully dressed each morning by eight o'clock with hair fashionably combed and face perfectly shaven, even though legally blind, moved to a nursing home. His wife of 70 years passed away recently, making the move necessary. After many hours of waiting patiently in the lobby of the nursing home, he smiled sweetly when told his room was ready. As he maneuvered his walker to the elevator, the nurse provided a visual description of his tiny room. "I love it," he stated with the enthusiasm of an eight-year old having just been presented with a new puppy. "But Mr. Jones, you haven't seen the room; just wait." "That doesn't have anything to do with it," he replied. "Happiness is something you decide on ahead of time. Whether I like my room or not doesn't depend on how the furniture is arranged ... it's how I arrange my mind. I already decided to love it. It's a decision I make every morning when I wake up. I have a choice; I can spend the day in bed recounting the difficulty I have with the parts of my body that no longer work or I can get out of bed and be thankful for the parts that do work." "Each day," he continued, "is a gift, and as long as my eyes open, I'll focus on the new day and all the happy memories I've stored away... just for this time in my life. Old age, you see, is like a bank account. You withdraw from what you've put in."

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