

Homily for the 30th Sunday of Ordinary Time - Year B

Sat 5:00 PM/Sun 8:00 AM St. Peter's Masses - October 23/24, 2021

Jeremiah 31:7-9 "I will lead them in a straight path in which they shall not stumble."

Psalms 126:1-6 "Those who go out weeping shall come home with shouts of joy."

Hebrews 5:1-6 "One does not presume the honour of high priest but only when called by God."

Mark 10:46-52 "Take heart. Get up. He is calling you."

What Is It That You Want?

Introduction

The Camino de Santiago, the Way of St. James, is an ancient pilgrimage route, with many starting points in Europe, with the destination of the city of Santiago in NW Spain, where it is believed that the remains of the Apostle James are buried, where today there is a great cathedral. Even today, many people are walking a traditional route that pilgrims as far back as the 13th century walked in search of faith, as part of a penance for some great sin, or just to gain some insight into the meaning of their lives. The word 'insight' contains the word 'sight'. It's not a physical sight but something deeper, something spiritual which all people must seek.

We don't have to 'go' somewhere to gain this insight. God is offering it to us in many ways, especially in the difficulties of our lives. However, I will always be grateful that my wife insisted we make that pilgrimage, for the spiritual sight that stays with me even today, years later. We began in south central France, in a small town where a bishop gives a blessing for spiritual insight to pilgrims starting out. At one point the way comes near to the town of Lourdes, where the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to a girl, whom we know as St. Bernadette. We took a side trip there, a 30 minute train ride. There is a place in Lourdes where you can line up with other pilgrims to go into a bath of water which has been the source of many reported

healings. We did not have time before our train (only one per day) would leave. The man overseeing the lineup asked me, "Do you want to go in the water?" I said we don't have time. He asked me again, "Do you want to go in the water?" Sure, I said, but we just don't have enough time. He just looked me in the eye and demanded more than asked, "Do you want to go in the water?" It's then that I realized Jesus was asking me what I really want from him, spiritual healing in the miraculous waters or to keep to the schedule I thought was so important. So I said, yes, I want to go in the water. That was amazing. Afterwards, we ran as fast as we could to the station and missed getting on by about 10 seconds. It seemed that God had disciplined me to make a choice for his way rather than my own.

Jeremiah

Jeremiah had to give a lot of bad news to Israel because of how they had wanted to walk in their own path, with their own priorities, rather than God's. However, today's reading from that prophet is one of consolation. He would bring home the blind and the lame. They would be healed.

Today, our people have been scattered by the pandemic and by the protocols that have been put in place. In a way, we have become exiles from one another and from the Church. Perhaps we have become blind to what is most important.

Blindness was very common in the ancient middle east. This is a huge symbol of the spiritual state of the people all throughout Sacred Scripture.

Mark

In the Gospels, we see that Jesus also identifies the difference between those who are physically blind, but have their spiritual eyes wide open, compared to those who can see but have entirely lost the vision of God's love and mercy and justice. To understand this final healing miracle in Mark's Gospel, it is important to understand that blindness is a symbol for spiritual ignorance.

Physically, this miracle of giving blind Bartameus seems to follow other miracles as simply healing, demonstrating God's power to heal. The details are simple. Jesus is walking along as he often is. People are following and listening to him, as they often are. They come across a blind beggar by the road, the poorest of the poor. He asks for his sight, Jesus gives it to him, the people are amazed and the man is very happy.

However, it should be clear that it is not Mark's intent to impress us with Jesus' power to heal blindness. There are a series of much deeper spiritual insights that Mark's readers are to understand:

- Bartameus hears the crowd and asks who it is. We need to be ready to ask if God is passing near to us.
- They tell him it is Jesus of Nazareth, but the physically blind man begins to shout to 'the Son of David'. He identifies Jesus with his Messianic title.
- He continues to shout after Jesus even though the people try to silence him. We will always be silenced by the world when we call out to Jesus. Our world has other priorities and often seeks to silence words directed to God.
- What does he should but: "Son of David, have mercy on me. Mercy is always about healing from sin. Bartameus knows exactly what to ask for and it attracts Jesus.
- Jesus calls for him to come, even though it would be easier for Jesus to go to him.
- Blind as he is, the beggar is fired up. He jumps up, leaving his cloak behind, a symbol of worldly possessions, even though it's basically all he has.
- Jesus asks: What do you want me to do for you? Doesn't Jesus know he's blind? Of course. What's important here? That he ask. God doesn't want to give us anything we don't want for ourselves. Our Lord is always seeking us, but he wants us to be convinced that we need him.

- Only then does he plead, "Teacher, let me see." Do you hear the hunger, the longing in him who has nothing? Can we say that we have this longing for the mercy of God?
- Jesus says to him, "Your faith has made you well." Again, as in other places, God cannot or will not give us what we do not have faith in.
- Finally, in his joy, it says that the blind man followed Jesus. He followed Jesus on THE WAY. We are being asked again today whether we will ask for God's mercy from the depths of our hearts, and then to follow him on HIS way, not our own.

Call To Action

We still have Jesus asking us the same questions. Do you want to see or not? Are you willing to plunge into the cold bath of renewal or are you obsessed with your earthly concerns and your troubles? Are you ready to be freed from your sin and cry out for God's mercy. The writer of Hebrews tells us that sin puts shame on our relationship with God. In the ancient world, the role of priests was to mediate for the one who was alienated from God, including himself.

No wonder Jesus was so harsh with the leaders. They were called and chosen. We have it backwards. We try to look like we don't have any fault but we cancel others.

Today's psalm refrain is for those who would desire God's mercy and to see again. "The Lord has done great things for us. We are filled with joy. Amazing Grace is the most sung hymn ever. What is the refrain? "I was blind but now I see."

What do you want me to do for you? The blind man answers, Lord, that I may see. It is now to you that Christ is speaking. He asks you, what do you want me to do for you? Let us make a decision to follow him on THE WAY.

Key Passages

Entrance Antiphon: *Let the hearts that seek the Lord rejoice.*

Collect: *Almighty and ever living God increase our faith, hope and charity, and make us love what you command, so that we may merit what you promise.*

Jeremiah: *Thus says the Lord, "Give praise, and say: Save, O Lord, your people, the remnant of Israel. See, I am going to gather them from the farthest parts of the earth ... With weeping they shall come and with consolations I will lead them back. I will let them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble, for I have become a father to Israel.*

Psalm: *The Lord has done great things for us. We are filled with joy. May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy. Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.*

Hebrews: *Every high priest chosen from among men is put in charge of things pertaining to God on their behalf, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He himself is subject to weakness and, because of this he must offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people. And one does not presume to take this honour, but only when called by God. So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest but was appointed.*

Mark: *A blind beggar, Bartimaeus, was sitting by the roadside. He began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!". Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart. Get up, he is calling you." So he sprang up and came to Jesus, who said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said to him, "My teacher, let me see again." Jesus said to him, "Go, your faith has made you well." Immediately the man regained his sight and followed Jesus on the way.*