

Homily for October 27- 28, 2018

30th Sunday of Ordinary Time

The Davidson Family

Are any of you familiar with *Our Town* by the American Play Write Thornton Wilder?

The play revolves around life in the small town of Grover's Corners, New Hampshire specifically, around the lives of George and Emily. When the play begins, George and Emily are teenaged neighbors and good friends, as are their parents. Over time, a romance is kindled between them, which culminates in marriage. Sadly Emily dies giving birth to her second child. After her death she is given permission to come back to earth for just a brief time. The day that she chooses to live over is her twelfth birthday.

As she enters into this day her mother is pre-occupied with preparations for the celebration. Her father returns home from work exhausted. Only Emily is aware of the few precious moments now remaining. She pleads: "Momma, just look at me once as though you really saw me." But her mother pays no attention. Emily can only relive the day; she cannot change anything. She goes to her father and tries to talk to him, but he is busy reading the paper and pays no attention. She can stand it no longer and she finally cries out: "I can't go on. It is going too fast. We don't have enough time to look at one another. I didn't realize what was going on. I never noticed it. Oh earth, you are too wonderful for anyone to realize you." And then she turns to the stage manager, the play's narrator, and asks:

"Do any human beings ever recognize life while they live it every, every minute?"

I like this question because it helps us consider how easy it is to live each day without seeing life's deeper purpose and meaning. As Emily relived her twelve birthday she saw it in a way that had been previously hidden from her. She is like the man at the centre of our Gospel reading today, the Blind Bartimaeus, who cried out:

"My teacher, let me see again."

St. Mark uses the story of Blind Bartimaeus as a literary device that is structurally important to his narrative. Mark is a masterful story teller. Today's Gospel reading is found at the end of chapter 10. Back in chapter 8 there is the healing of another blind man, from Bethsaida. In between these two healing stories, Jesus three times predicts his passion, and in each case the Apostles do not understand. The reader discovers the apostles are becoming increasingly spiritually blind to the mission and passion of Jesus. This reached a climax in last Sunday's Gospel, when James and John wanted positions of power – thrones on either side of Jesus in heavenly splendor.

Jesus, you will remember, then stated that he came not to be served but to serve and give his life a ransom for many. This is the central theme of Mark's Gospel. Immediately after this interaction Mark tells the reader that Jesus and the Apostles came to Jericho where they encounter Bartimaeus.

There are three things I want to highlight in this story.

- Bartimaeus Request
- The Crowd's Rebuke
- Jesus' Respect.

1. Bartimaeus' Request:

Twice we hear Bartimaeus call out: "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me". As is always the case there is more to hear in this phrase than we can grasp on a first listening.

Notice first of all the phrase "son of". The blind man is the son of Timaeus. Jesus is the Son of David. Mark presents Bartimaeus' origins, he came from the loins of his father Timaeus. But when Bartimaeus addresses the Lord, he calls him the Son of David, twice. This is important and is tied to the attribute of God Bartimaeus also refers to twice. "Mercy".

Mercy is that word used most often in the Old Testament to express God's compassionate kindness. But it is also a word used in connection with God's faithfulness to his promises, what are called God's covenants. The Bible's major divisions. Old and New Covenants, or Testaments, makes this clear. By calling Jesus Son of David, Bartimaeus realizes that all of God's promises find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. He also knows that his life's purpose and destiny is intricately related to Jesus' mercy.

With subtlety Mark is telling us something important. We all have a family name that defines our origin. My last name, "Gibson", is what is called a patronymic, for I am the son of Gib. Bartimaeus is also a patronymic and is the Aramaic equivalent to Gibson. So even if your last name isn't a patronymic we all have a clan from which we originated. This is obvious. What is not so obvious is we are also to belong to a clan that is our family of destiny. It is tied to the patronymic "Davidson". The Son of David, Jesus wants us to know that we belong to his family too. For you see when God created you, he gave you yourself. When God redeemed you, he gave you Himself.

This is what Bartimaeus desired. Left to himself he was blind and disorientated. And so he made this bold request to Jesus, I want to see again and become part of your family.

2. The Crowd's Rebuke:

However, in response to Bartimaeus' request there is the crowd's rebuke:

⁴⁸ Many sternly ordered him to be quiet,

It is always the case there will be those who declare, be quiet. Don't talk about joining the Davidson clan. You have only one family, the one you came from. How true this is today where so many are influenced by the ideology of atheism and this is having a great impact on young people, who in ever increasing numbers deny the existence of God. With the ever louder rebuke of the crowd ordering people to be quiet and not call out to the Son of David, as Christians we

can be intimidated. But we need not be. For notice we can be the other voice, although in the minority can say:

“Take heart; get up, he is calling you.”

3. Jesus’ respect:

Notice how different the voice of Jesus is from the rebuke of the crowd. Let me quote the Gospel directly here:

⁵¹ Then Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man said to him, “My teacher, let me see again.” ⁵² Jesus said to him, “Go; your faith has made you well.” Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.¹

Notice Jesus respects Bartimaeus’ integrity. He enters into his life with words of invitation and request. He invites him to come and then asks what does the blind man desire.

Now let’s pause here and consider his request. He wants to see again. He wasn’t born blind but at a certain age had lost his sight. Remember I said a few minutes ago that the Apostles were becoming increasingly spiritually blind? Bartimaeus speaks for them and for all who have lost sight of Jesus. But notice what happens. Mark tells us in responding to Jesus’ call Bartimaeus: “throws off his cloak, sprang up and came to Jesus.” And then Jesus declares that his faith made him well, resulting in two things: the restoration of sight so that he could follow Jesus along the way.

The cloak in some way represents the life the blind man had been living. It hindered him. But now he has a new purpose and energy. He knows that his primary identity is no longer as the son of Timaeus but as a member of the Davidson family. What is this family? It is the Church. We know that one of the earliest descriptions of the Church was to call them the Way. I like this designation for the Church. For it speaks of the Church as a path, we take as we journey through life.

As I have done for the past two Sunday Masses, I will end this homily by reference to the theme of Stewardship. A steward is someone who has been entrusted to care for the property of another. In our case, we are stewards of the property of Jesus’ Kingdom. A key component of this property is the Good News that we are members of the Davidson clan. This good news is called in Greek the *Euangelion*. It is from this words we get the English word “Evangelization”.

We are stewards of the *Euangelion*. This means that we are that community that is always inviting people, who in desiring to join Jesus’ family say: “Take heart, he is calling you”.

For like Bartimaeus our faith is helping us to see and so follow Jesus along the Way. We want others to join us so that with Emily in “Our Town” we can recognize life while we live it as we

¹ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Mk 10:46–52). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

discover that what matters most is not our patronymic of origin, the clan we were born into, but our patronymic of destiny as we too cry out: “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me and all you are calling”.