

Homily for Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> Week of Ordinary Time

1 Peter 2:2–5, 9–12

Psalm 100:2–5

Mark 10:46–52

One of the gifts of biblical study is the discovery of the literary intentions of the authors. Because we hear the Bible read in fragments we can find it hard to appreciate some of the overarching themes the authors want to convey. Today's Gospel is a case in point.

We just heard read the second of two healing stories relating to men who are blind that Mark includes in his Gospel. The first is in chapter 8 and concentrates on a blind man at Bethsaida. The story we heard today is found right at the end of chapter 10. Now the question is, what comes in between the healing in chapter 8 and that of blind Bartimaeus in chapter 10? Here is the answer. Three times Jesus will predict his impending death and three times those closest to him, the Twelve Apostles, cannot see what he is talking about. After the first prediction, Simon-Peter says "God forbid it Lord" and Jesus says to Simon-Peter "Get behind me Satan". After the second prediction, the apostles are then fighting with one another about who is the greatest, even though Jesus has been talking with them about daily picking up their crosses and following him. In yesterday's Gospel we heard conveyed Jesus' third prediction. And again the apostles James and John don't see what Jesus is getting at. For immediately they ask for positions of glory in heaven and when the other ten hear of the brothers' request they become indignant and a fight breaks out.

St. Mark wants us to understand that those closest to Jesus don't get it, they cannot understand or see clearly what the passion prediction means for Jesus or for themselves. Now enter the two blind men. After Jesus heals the man at Bethsaida St. Mark comments:

***Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he looked intently and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.***

Of Bartimaeus Mark writes:

***Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.***

Here is what Mark wants us his readers to take away from this. The first blind man represents those who see clearly what the passion means. Mark wants us the reader to identify with this man so that as we read the Passion Story we understand that it is to work on our souls and bring about a deeper conversion so that with Bartimaeus we too will follow Jesus on the way. And where is it Jesus is going? The very next scene is in Mark 11 and Jesus is in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday with his eyes fixed on the Cross. We too are to pick up our Cross and follow Bartimaeus to Calvary.

St. Peter who was the primary source St. Mark turned to in order to write his Gospel must have thought long and hard about how the passion and following in the way of Jesus to Calvary is to impact our lives.

Such thinking resulted in his writing this beautiful letter we have been reading from all week. In today's passage he has something to say to us about seeing Jesus clearly and following him along the way.

***Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and 5 like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.***

Here Peter is using two Old Testament passages from Psalm 118 and Isaiah to have us see the passion from the perspective of a building. The Church says Peter is not made of bricks and mortar. Rather the Church was founded on the death and resurrection of Jesus. He is its foundation and all who appropriate the passion in their own lives are living stones, who joined to Christ and one another are being built into a spiritual house and are a holy priesthood. When we see who we are in relation to the passion of Jesus St. Peter then goes on to show us how we follow Jesus along the way:

***But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.***

If all this is true—that each of us has been called to be a member of a “royal priesthood” and a “holy nation”—then each of us is also called to participate in the *mission* of this priesthood and nation to the whole world. We are God's “own people” not simply for our own sakes. We are also called to “announce the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light.” This is why the Church today has called for a “New Evangelization.” Each of us needs to know and experience the freshness of the gospel and to experience wonder at being called into God's marvelous light. Not many of us are called to preach to large multitudes, but all of us are capable of giving personal testimony to the great deeds that God has worked in our own lives.

Today the Church remembers someone who did just that. Saint Philip Neri. Philip was one of the noble line of Saints raised up by God in the sixteenth century to console and bless His Church during the century of the Protestant Reformation and Counter Reformation. He took to heart Peter's teaching and lived his life seeing the Passion and walking the way of the Cross.

It was said of him:

***He read the hearts of men, foretold their future, knew their eternal destiny. His touch gave health of body; his very look calmed souls in trouble and drove away temptations. He was gay, genial, and irresistibly winning; neither insult nor wrong could dim the brightness of his joy.***

He inspired a boundless confidence and love, and was the common refuge and consoler of all. He died in his eightieth year, on May 26 in 1595, and bears the grand title of Apostle of Rome.