

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time B:
October 27, 2024
“Lord, that I might see!”

This Sunday, we meet a man whose words have become a prayer for thousands of people throughout the world. What words are those? “*Lord, that I might see!*” (St. Mark 10. 51) There is so much written about this Gospel passage, one hardly knows where to begin. I have chosen, therefore, to try to be very simple. (You know how *difficult* that is for me to do!) But, I found some really marvelous ideas from my old friend, Dr. William Barclay, which I think might help each and every one of us, not just in our understanding of this Gospel passage, but in our everyday lives of faith and piety, as well. So, here goes!

We can pretty much rest assured that our friend, Bartimaeus, was blind from birth. Now, in spite of the fact that we are already deep in the midst of Autumn, the Gospel from which we are reading is in the middle Spring, in the Passover Season. Jesus is traveling through Jericho, that marvelous little tropical town with its jungle trees and lush, beautiful flowers – O my!, the fruits and vegetables you cannot imagine! Our Lord is making His way up the hill, about fifteen miles to Jerusalem for Passover, as the Law requires. Barclay says something marvelous about this trip of Jesus: “[f]or Jesus the end of the road was not far away. Jericho was only about 15 miles from Jerusalem.” (1)

What does Barclay mean when he says “the end of the road was not far away?” He means, very simply, that in the next chapter of the Gospel of St. Mark, chapter 11, Jesus will begin His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, i.e., Jesus will begin what we normally refer to as Holy Week, which will end, as our Faith instructs us, with His Passion, death and Resurrection. But, we must not get ahead of ourselves. Let us return to the text of today’s Gospel.

Barclay makes a point about Jericho that I did not know. It seems that Jericho was a sort of ‘bedroom community’ for many of the priests and Levites that were required for Temple service in Jerusalem. Barclay writes:

There were attached to the Temple over 20,000 priests and as many levites. Obviously they could not all serve at the one time. They were therefore divided into twenty-six courses which served in rotation. Very many of these priests and levites resided in Jericho when they were not on actual temple duty. There must have been many of them in the crowd that day... They would be doubly eager to see this rebel who was about to invade Jerusalem. There would be many cold and bleak and hostile eyes in the crowd that day, because it was clear that if Jesus was right, the whole Temple worship was one vast irrelevancy. (2)

So, in our Gospel today, we find the Lord, walking and talking, teaching as He walks along through the crowd, making His way resolutely towards Jerusalem. This is to be expected, since this was the way of all

itinerant preachers, then and now. Much of the crowd would have been delighted with the Lord’s words, but certainly not all. And, in the midst of the Lord’s preaching, a voice is raised: “*Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me!*” (10. 47)

It is at this point that we see a drama unfolding between the Lord and this blind man, Bartimaeus. Dr. Barclay refers to this drama as an “illuminating story,” in which “we can see many of the things we might call the conditions of miracle.” (3) Barclay lists five things or five conditions in this Gospel passage which lead to a miracle. Those conditions are: 1) Bartimaeus’ persistence in the face of adversity; 2) his immediate and eager response to the call of the Lord; 3) the fact that, when called by the Lord, Bartimaeus knew *precisely* what it was that he wanted; 4) Bartimaeus’ faith; and 5) Bartimaeus, having been touched by Jesus, decides to *follow* Jesus. Let us, very briefly, look at these points.

1. If Bartimaeus is anything, he is persistent! And, Bartimaeus is persistent in the face of everyone and everything! When first Bartimaeus realizes that Jesus is passing by, he calls out to the Lord: “*Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me!*” His outcry would have been seen as a cry of disrespect, especially had he interrupted the words of the Saviour. The Scripture makes it very clear that the crowd following the Lord, indeed, interpreted Bartimaeus’ calls in just that way: “*Many people were scolding him to keep quiet, but he shouted all the louder.*” (10. 48) It takes guts to raise your voice against a crowd, especially when the crowd is right there, pressing against you. But, there might have been something else *pressing against* Bartimaeus. I wonder. Do you really think this was the first time Bartimaeus had raised his voice in agony to a passing teacher or healer, only to be left in desolation? Could it be that Bartimaeus had to fight a war within himself, saying something to the effect: “I’ve called to healer after healer. What makes this Man any different? Why even try? Why get my hopes up again, only to be dashed on the rocks of hopelessness? Better to just get by...” And yet, his persistence against all odds...How often do *we* have that kind of persistence? How often, in the midst of our daily difficulties, have we remembered this strange passage from the Gospel of St. Matthew: “*From John the Baptizer’s time until now the Kingdom of God has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force!*” (St. Matthew 11. 12) Jesus wants, when we call upon Him, the violence of our sheer persistence in prayer and supplication!

2. Bartimaeus, hearing Jesus’ call, responded immediately and eagerly. There was no shilly-shallying, no ‘putting off until tomorrow.’ Barclay remarks: “Certain chances happen only once.” At the risk of scandalizing you, I thought of a rather more prosaic piece of wisdom taken from a rather more prosaic source – the 2001 movie hit *Rat Race*. In this zany spoof, a sort of up-dated version of the 1963 classic *It’s a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World*, one of the characters points out: “Good things take time; great things happen in an instant.” Of course, the problem with a moment like this is, you either see it (and isn’t it amazing, *blind* Bartimaeus *did see*

it!) or you don't. If it helps, let me point out, prayer is of the essence here.

3. Bartimaeus knew precisely what he wanted. How often is it that we go to the Lord, either in prayer privately, or, simply to Holy Mass, and we aren't focused? We just sort of dither around. There can be any number of reasons for this. I suspect one of the reasons why we do not take the Lord seriously when He says: "Ask, and you shall receive. Seek, and you shall find. Knock, and the door shall be opened to you. For the one who asks, receives. The one who seeks, finds. The one who knocks, enters." (St. Matthew 7. 7-8) We also hear the voice of Jesus in the Book of Revelation reminding us: "Here I stand, knocking at the door. If anyone hears Me calling and opens the door, I shall enter his house and dine with him, and he with Me." (Revelation 3. 20) Is it possible that we are simply afraid to ask the Lord for what we want because He might say no? May I point out that the door to which the passage in Revelations refers to is the 'door' of one's heart? This point, # 3, is also related to the first point, that is, persistence in prayer and persistence in the face of adversity. If we persistently open our heart to the Hearts of Jesus and Mary, do you not think that our desires will more and more conform to the Will of God, that our wills will begin to resemble God's will? Real prayer, prayer from the heart focuses us, grounds us in humility so that we begin to resemble the Saviour Who teaches us how to pray.

4. Bartimaeus refers to Jesus as *Son of David*. This is rather interesting. Bartimaeus could in no way see what was going on around him... yet, as the great Scripture scholar, Fr. Breen points out, the title *Son of David* "was a synonym for the Messiah. In that state of religious thought, to recognize Jesus' Messiahship was faith." (4) What is our faith regarding the Lord Jesus? Today, if one looks at any of the studies regarding religious faith in the United States, it would seem that our country, and the Catholic Church in this country, is in a no-man's land. How have we come to this lamentable state? There is, I am sure, any number of reasons. I am reminded of an old story from my friends in Alcoholics Anonymous. They used to say that there was one reason never given by a person about why he, if you'll pardon the expression, 'fell off the wagon.' What is that reason? "If I just hadn't gone to that AA

meeting, I wouldn't have gone out and gotten loaded!" Our Catholic Faith is, in many respects, rather the same. There are so many reasons to fall away. Here is one reason I've never heard for falling away. "If I just wouldn't have gone to Mass." Or, a variant: "If I just wouldn't have prayed that Rosary for the third time, everything would have worked out fine!"

The Rosary is an interesting case in point. When we pray the Rosary well, meditating on the Mysteries of the Rosary, i.e., on the Mysteries of the life, death and Resurrection of the Lord, we are, in fact, meditating on the Holy Gospel *in miniature*, as it were. Isn't it interesting that our society has become so confused that it has relegated the Rosary to a *private Marian devotion* when it is really a tool the primary task of which is to teach us the heart of the Gospel? Only with the healed eyes of Bartimaeus – "Lord, that I might see!" – can we realize this.

5. Number five is easy. We must follow Jesus and Mary. And, as a very dear friend of mine, Sr. Lucille Feehan used to remind me – quite often – how often is it when something goes wrong, we ask for prayers, and, Heaven forbid, we might even pray a little bit ourselves, and the Lord grants us our prayers! And, we're so happy! But! Do we remember to thank the Lord and Our Lady? Hmmm.

In this Gospel, Jesus calls out to us. *Follow Me!* Follow Me whether I say 'yes' to your prayer or 'no.' But to truly follow Jesus, I must have the faith of Bartimaeus. I must be able to say – *and believe!* – with Bartimaeus the words He said: "Lord, that I may see" whether I see or not! To use the words of a great saint, St. Josemaría Escrivá, if you follow Jesus on His way, you will be trying to walk in His own footsteps, "to clothe yourself in Christ's clothing, to be Christ Himself!" (5) A point from Escrivá's little book, *The Forge*, will sum up everything very nicely:

Courage! Get up! He is calling you. In those days, the Gospel tells us, the Lord was passing by; and they, the sick, called to Him and sought Him out. Now, too, Christ is passing by, in your Christian life. If you help Him many will come to know Him, will ask Him for help: and their eyes will be opened to the marvelous light of grace. (6)

1. William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark, The Daily Study Bible, Revised Edition*, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1975, pg. 259
2. Ibid., pg. 260
3. Ibid., pg. 261
4. Fr. A. E. Breen, *A Harmonized Exposition of the Four Gospels*, vol. 3 of 4, John P. Smith Printing Co., Rochester, N.Y., 1908, pg. 521
5. St. Josemaría Escrivá, cited in *In Conversation with God*, vol. 5 of 7, Scepter, London and New York, 1992, pg. 321
6. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Forge*, cited in *In Conversation with God*, vol. 5 of 7, pg. 323