

30th Sunday Ordinary Time Year “B”

October 23-24, 2021

What do you want me to do for you?

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

Typically, the Old Testament reading on any Sunday connects in some way with the Gospel, much more so than the second reading does. At times though, the connection between the first reading and Gospel is less clear. Today is such a case. Our prophecy from Jeremiah describes the exiles of the Northern Kingdom on their return from the nations where the Assyrians had resettled them. The sense we get is that of, a release of a large throng from captivity, a second exodus of sorts. It also notes that among those returning will be “the blind and the lame.”

Sometimes it is only in the details that we may be able to appreciate the full impact of the message of the Scriptures. Such is the case today about Bartimaeus. Understandably, the details often get left behind in favor of the central point. It is only in St. Mark’s Gospel that Bartimaeus is named, even while the account is contained in the others.

The evangelist also names his father, Timaeus, leading St. Augustine to speculate that Bartimaeus “... had fallen from some position of great prosperity and was now regarded as an object of the most notorious and the most remarkable wretchedness, because, in addition to being blind, he had also to sit begging.”¹ Perhaps Timeaus was himself well-known.

Jesus was on his last journey through Jericho, on the route from Galilee to Jerusalem. How many people had passed by the blind beggar? Perhaps Jesus had seen him on one of his earlier journeys. Maybe Bartimaeus had let the opportunity pass him by as well. But now he asks for something deeper. Bartimaeus, simply wanted to see—a most reasonable request given his circumstances. But in asking for help, he began by twice asking for pity—one gets the impression he asked even more often than that.

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, homily at the Closing Mass for the Synod of Bishops, 28 October 2012. The Holy Father was quoting from St. Augustine’s *On the Consensus of the Evangelists*, 2, 65, 125.

Bartimaeus was persistent and unafraid; Jesus called him over into his presence. The crowd said, “Take courage; get up, Jesus is calling you.”

In his signature document, “The Joy of the Gospel,” Pope Francis cites this passage as being indicative of our Lord’s approach with the downtrodden: Jesus himself is the model of this method of evangelization which brings us to the very heart of his people. How good it is for us to contemplate the closeness which he shows to everyone! If he speaks to someone, he looks into their eyes with deep love and concern...we see how accessible he is, as he draws near the blind man.²

There is another detail mentioned that is more significant than it may first appear. When Bartimaeus jumped up to come to Jesus, he left his mantle or coat behind. In describing those who followed Jesus, St. Mark noted how often these people *left something behind* as they went with Jesus. Simon and Andrew abandoned their **nets** (Mk 1:18). James and John left their **father with the hired servants in the boat** (Mk 1:20). Levi walked away from his **customs post** (Mk 2:14). Jesus commanded the rich man to **sell all his possessions** and give to the poor to follow him. (Mk 10:21)

Similarly, Bartimaeus left everything– I mean **everything**– behind to come to Jesus. Beggars spread out a coat beside the road, so passers-by could lay alms on it. The Book of Exodus even legislates about this: “If you take your neighbor’s cloak as a pledge, you shall return it to him before sunset; for this is his only covering; it is the cloak for his body.”³

One last detail...Bartimaeus is the first person mentioned in St. Mark’s Gospel who recognizes the explicit identity of Jesus as the Messiah. He does not call him “Jesus of Nazareth,” but “Jesus, Son of David.”

What would leave behind to follow Jesus? How many times might we realize that Jesus has been calling us to a deeper union, only to allow him to pass by? This was Bartimaeus’ last chance, and he made the most of it.

² Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 24 November 2013, paragraph #269

³ Cf. Exodus 22: 25-26a

When he approaches, our Lord Jesus asks him a question: “What do you want me to do for you?” Bartimaeus did not hesitate to answer, “Master, I want to see.” When we have our moment— our best chance with Jesus— will we make the most of it? Seize the day; now is the time. Do not let it slip by, for it may not present itself again in the same way.

What are we prepared to leave behind? Can we let go of that which keeps us spiritually blind, that which holds us prisoner to our own desires? Can we reach out to others for whom the world has become dark and void of the deeper meaning that the Lord Jesus provides for our lives?

We who love Jesus must be prepared to deny ourselves and where necessary, take up our crosses. The call of Jesus, in and through His Church, beckons us. It beckons us not just to sit there, but like Bartimaeus, to take courage, get up and follow Him. Jesus asks us the same question he asked Bartimaeus: “What do you want me to do for you?” May we have the courage to answer.