

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

cf. 2 Tim 1:10

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Our Savior Jesus Christ destroyed death
and brought life to light through the Gospel.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Mark 10:46-52; L149B

As Jesus was leaving Jericho with
his disciples and a sizable
crowd,

Bartimaeus, a blind man, the
son of Timaeus,

sat by the roadside begging.

On hearing that it was Jesus of
Nazareth,

he began to cry out and say,

“Jesus, son of David, have pity
on me.”

And many rebuked him, telling him to
be silent.

But he kept calling out all the more,

“Son of David, have pity on me.”

Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.”

So they called the blind man, saying to
him,

“Take courage; get up, Jesus is
calling you.”

He threw aside his cloak, sprang up,
and came to Jesus.

Jesus said to him in reply, “What do
you want me to do for you?”

The blind man replied to him, “Master,
I want to see.”

Jesus told him, “Go your way; your
faith has saved you.”

Immediately he received his sight
and followed him on the way.



Reflecting on the Gospel

The Gospel of Mark introduces us to a variety of characters not seen elsewhere or even mentioned again in the New Testament. Bartimaeus, the blind man, is one such example. We have not been told of him in any story prior to this in the Gospel of Mark. And after this brief episode we will never hear of him again. Matthew and Luke will tell different versions of the story, but each is built on Mark. It's as though the reader or the early community would have known Bartimaeus as the blind man who sat begging on the road to Jericho.

From the way the story is told, Bartimaeus certainly had heard of Jesus, for upon learning that he was on the road, Bartimaeus immediately cries out. His behavior is judged to be uncouth and undignified, not worthy of Jesus or his followers. The response Bartimaeus receives is one that we might expect in “polite society.” He is shut down. We can imagine the rebukes: Nobody wants to hear a shrieking blind man calling out for Jesus. Let Jesus and his followers pass in peace. Don't make a scene. Bartimaeus will have none of it and cries out all the more. It's as though nothing else matters but Jesus and the power he has.

In an exchange reminiscent of Jesus' interaction with James and John last week, Jesus asks him point-blank, “What do you want me to do for you?”

Here again we might ask ourselves, how would we respond to Jesus' query? Face-to-face with Jesus and his direct question, “What do you want?” How are we to answer? We recall how James and John answered. They wanted glory. They wanted to sit at either side of Jesus in the kingdom. But Bartimaeus responds differently. He simply wants to see. For him, not one of the Twelve, not one of the chosen from the beginning, there is no grasping for power, glory, or authority. Bartimaeus merely wants to be made whole.

Jesus' response and Bartimaeus's healing is immediate and simultaneous. His sight is restored and he follows Jesus. Perhaps surprisingly, we never hear of Bartimaeus again. He is now a true disciple, a follower of Jesus. And his faith response to Jesus is a model for us, perhaps even a better model than the brothers James and John.

Living the Paschal Mystery

At times we can think of the disciples as something of superheroes. The stories told about them in catechetical classes or homilies can make them seem like exemplars of faith. Today we hear about another disciple, not one of the Twelve, but a follower of Jesus nevertheless. It's not an accident that the story of Bartimaeus follows immediately upon the story of James and John. In each story Jesus asks, “What do you want me to do for you?” That question is asked of us too. Will our answer be like the brothers who want to game the system for their own glory? Or will our answer be like the blind Bartimaeus who seeks merely to see? Though the brothers James and John were called by Jesus from the beginning, it seems that Bartimaeus has a better self-understanding. He is more humble and less grandiose than the “real” disciples. Bartimaeus, about whom we know very little, serves as a prime example of discipleship. What do we seek of Jesus? What do we want Jesus to do for us?

Focusing the Gospel

Mark 10:46-52

Mark's story of the blind Bartimaeus, which takes place just before Jesus' Palm Sunday entry into Jerusalem in Mark's gospel, is as much a "call" story as a healing story. For Mark, Bartimaeus is a model of faith. The blind beggar calls out to Jesus using the messianic title "Son of David." He first asks, not for his sight, but for compassion: he understands that this Jesus, unlike other preachers and healers, operates out of a spirit of love and compassion for humanity, and so Bartimaeus places his faith in that spirit. Ironically, the blind Bartimaeus "sees" in Jesus the spirit of compassionate service that, until now, his "seeing" disciples have so far been unable to comprehend.

Focusing the First Reading

Jer 31:7-9

Bartimaeus is one of Jeremiah's "remnant" of the humble and faithful poor—including the blind, the lame, the sick, mothers and their children—whom the Lord will gather from exile and restore as a nation.

Focusing the Responsorial Psalm

Ps 126:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6 (3)

The exiled Jews have returned to their homeland from Babylon. Grateful for their deliverance, they realize a great deal of work is ahead of them in rebuilding the city and recultivating the scorched earth. Psalm 126 is both the returning Jews' song of thanks to God for their deliverance and their plea to God for help in restoring their country.

Focusing the Second Reading

Heb 5:1-6

Today's reading from the letter to the Hebrews exalts the great reconciling love of God to raise up Jesus Christ as our eternal High Priest, the perfect mediator between God and humankind. Priesthood is not a call that one assumes on one's own, for one's own glory or satisfaction; the call to priesthood comes from God to an individual for the blessing and service of his people.

PROMPTS FOR HOMILISTS, CATECHISTS, AND RCIA TEAMS

Have you ever experienced blindness of any kind—physical, emotional, intellectual? How were your eyes or consciousness finally opened to what you did not see or understand?

Did you ever fail to recognize the goodness of God in your midst during a difficult time in your life?

Who do you know who are among the faithful "remnant" like Bartimaeus: individuals who, despite the poverty and challenges they face, show us the light and riches of God?