

The Thirtieth Sunday of Ordinary Time
October 25, 2015

In today's reading from the Gospel of Mark, we learn that as Jesus is leaving the city of Jericho, he encounters a man named Bartimaeus who happens to be blind. For Mark, the healing of those who are blind become an important part in the narrative of Jesus' journey from Galilee to Jerusalem.

When Jesus began his journey towards Jerusalem back in Chapter 8, he healed a blind man in Bethsaida which is a sea side town on the very northern edge of the Sea of Galilee.

And now Jesus is nearing the end of his journey and he's only twelve miles from entering into Jerusalem where he will eventually experience the Paschal Mystery of his suffering, death and resurrection.

And so Mark places the healing of a blind man at the beginning of Jesus journey to Jerusalem and the healing of another blind man, Bartimaeus towards the end.

Why are these two episodes of Jesus healing of the blind so important to Mark? Because sandwiched in between the healing of the blind man at Bethsaida and the healing of Bartimaeus at Jericho is the central theme of this middle section of Mark's Gospel: And that theme highlights the spiritual blindness of Jesus' own disciples.

We saw a good example of the disciples' blindness in last week's Gospel passage when John and James tried to gain a special place of honor next to Jesus. Because of their blindness, they were unable to recognize who Jesus really is or even the real purpose of his mission.

In fact, up to today's reading the only ones who fully recognized Jesus were demons and evil spirits. The disciples who lived with Jesus day in and day out *should* have known, but their spiritual blindness prevented them from seeing Jesus clearly.

And so Jesus, along with many other pilgrims coming to Jerusalem for the Passover are about to leave Jericho, which is kind of like the last rest area before entering into Jerusalem.

Along the road there are many poor and sick people hoping to gain a little money or compassion from the people who travel along that busy road. Bartimaeus is just one of a whole host of suffering people along the way. And yet, in spite of his blindness, he hears that Jesus of Nazareth is nearby and is able to "see" Jesus for who He truly is.

Now, he calls out to Jesus using an ancient title for the Messiah, "Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me!" And those around Jesus, including his disciples, demonstrate again *their* spiritual blindness by scolding Bartimaeus and telling him to be quiet.

And then, Jesus asks Bartimaeus the very same question that he asked James and John in last week's Gospel: "What do you want me to do for you?"

The contrast between the answer that the blind man gives and what James and John asked for is clear. Instead of asking for material benefits and the promise of power and glory like the disciples did last week, Bartimaeus simply answers, "Master, I want to see." And in his response, Bartimaeus demonstrates that he knows his own powerlessness and that he knows who it is that is standing before him. In his blindness, he is able to see more clearly than those with so-called "normal" vision.

The prayer of Bartimaeus, "Master, I want to see" ought to be our prayer as well.

If we are to live faithfully in the upcoming Year of Mercy, we must turn daily to the Lord, knowing without a doubt that he will hear our prayers and he will give us new sight to see so that we can grow in love for Him and for those we encounter every day of our lives.

Our Gospel reading today also invites us to place ourselves along the way with Bartimaeus to contemplate and admit our own blind spots. To the extent that we can recognize our own blindness, we can also call out with Bartimaeus to ask for help, repeating as necessary the “Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy” that the liturgy itself urges us to pray.

Then, if we can scrounge up the freedom and courage to do so honestly, we may repeat with Bartimaeus, “Master, I want to see.” When we do that, our faith assures us that the Son of God present in word, sacrament and the community will lead us to new sight and new life beyond anything we could possibly imagine.