

Commentary to the 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time



The grandchildren suddenly realized their blind grandfather was missing. They finally found him planting trees in a nearby field. They were upset. The old gentleman calmly said, "But don't you see how future generations will admire these trees?" The blind grandfather could see. His family, each with 20/20 vision, were blind. Miserable people are not those who are blind but rather those who refuse to see. (John Kiley)

Blindness in Christ's time was common. Hygiene was very primitive. Eye doctors had not yet arrived with their magic drops and wonderful lasers.

However, what is interesting about this story is that the patient is given a proper name. Mark was not in the habit of being so specific. So, Bartimaeus is a VIP waiting to happen. When Jesus was walking by, Bartimaeus gave Him a raucous yell. His eyes were dead but God had gifted him with a first class set of lungs. Onlookers tried to silence him, but Bartimaeus paid no heed. Then as now, people had no time or patience for the handicapped. Mark is telling us if you want to get something from the Teacher, you must keep after Him. You must even pester Him. You must not abandon your quest by saying, "God's busy; He's got the whole wide world in His hands!" The savant teaches, "You won't get an answer at God's door if you aren't knocking." Learn from Bartimaeus. You must know what you want. Generalities waste God's time. "Bring peace to the whole world" prayer is a no brainer.

Also from this incident one learns something important about the Teacher. Though all else lose their cool with the blind man's shouting, Jesus does not. He had every reason to. He was attempting to teach the people about His mission. So, obviously He will not get annoyed with you if you make a nuisance of yourself with persistent prayer to Him.

Bartimaeus shouts, "Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me." That was clearly a Messianic title. Like the grandfather who opened this homily, Bartimaeus, though blind, could see. His instincts were sharper than a fresh razor blade. The divinity of Jesus had come across to him in waves. But those about him,

who enjoyed good vision, were blind to the Son of Man. The blind and deaf Helen Keller said, "The most beautiful things in the world can't be seen or even touched. They must be felt with the heart."

Clever Bartimaeus saw Christ clearly with the eyes of his soul. So must you and I. Or in a saint's words, "I believe that I may understand." The Nazarene uncustomarily did nothing to shush him up as he blew His cover. So, in John Ryan's words, Bartimaeus becomes the first person of record from whom the Master accepted an acknowledgment of His Messiahship. This is the reason Mark names this important man. Jesus pauses in mid-syllable. This is a time for doing. He puts His own schedule on the back burner. He gives Bartimaeus center stage. More importantly, He gives him his sight. Many talk the talk but refuse to walk the walk. The Christ cannot be indicted for this crime. Nor should we who are His followers. We too should belong to the "Just do it!" school. Incidentally, do you still feel Christ has no time for you?

Notice please that Bartimaeus does not wear the Master down with small requests when He asks, "What do you want me to do for you?" Bartimaeus goes for the whole nine yards, "Master, let me see again." He gets his wish. Mark's point is none too subtle. When you come to the Christ, do not bother Him with Lilliputian requests. Go for broke. Jesus obviously enjoys people who want the moon as well as the stars. He is one generous God. Should we forget it, we become the losers. John Newton sums up the case this way: "Thou art coming to a king. Large petitions with thee bring."

This is the last healing miracle in Mark's Gospel. In Bartimaeus, Mark presents a trinity worth pondering. As William Barclay notes, the blind fellow begins with a need. Secondly he offers a heartfelt thank you to his Healer. Finally in Mark's economic prose, "he followed Him along the road." That trinity is what Christian discipleship is all about - need, gratitude, and enlistment. We would all do well to take a page out of Bartimaeus' modus operandi. Let us not be among the many who, though not blind, still refuse to see. Note well the cured man drives a heart through the tired old line that teaches seeing is believing. For him believing is seeing.

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