

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B - To enjoy the wonders of God's love for us, we have to have faith in Him and let Him lead the way. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me. (John 14)

October 24, 2021.

Before I begin, I like to thank parishioners of St Paul for the super generous support of the Christmas Shoebox charity organized by the parish Catholic Women's League to bring joy to the needy children in the third world countries. Two hundred Shoeboxes are almost all taken. Generosity is associated with holiness. It is a virtue given to all of us by the Holy Spirit and we have the freedom and choice to, or not to exercise it. It not an act so much as a state, but is an attitude towards life, the values of life. May God bless you all, Amen.

Amazing grace. How sweet the sound. That saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now I'm found. Was blind, but now I see. (Amazing Grace, Lyrics)

In this Sunday's Gospel reading, Mark (10:46-52) invites us to join him as he describes Jesus' progress to Jerusalem: situating ourselves among the group that – though they are truly attached to the Saviour – still have so much to learn. At Jericho, with the journey to Jerusalem almost completed, Mark includes the story of Bartimaeus the blind beggar. Typical of Mark's style, the brief story has a vivid ring of immediacy. But it also has a telling lesson. Making the blind see is the first of the messianic signs (see Is 42:7) appealed to by Jesus, when – from his prison – John the Baptist sent his friends to ask of Jesus, 'Are you the one who is to come?' (Lk 7:22). **Jesus is surrounded by blindness – the bewildered confusion of the twelve; the cruel reaction of the crowd, who scolded Bartimaeus and told him to keep quiet; the blindness of those in Jerusalem determined to destroy him. Through his miracle, Jesus makes Bartimaeus a living sign of what he is doing in the name of his Father – healing the world's blindness, leading the human family to see in him the truth of God's ways.**

God's grace has prepared the blind beggar. As he works the miracle for him, Jesus commends his 'faith'. Unfortunately, many people have a very abstract understanding of 'faith' – as an acceptance of revealed truths. **'Faith' has a very concrete meaning when it is referred to by Jesus. For old Israel, God was known through the 'great things' God had done for Israel. God had a plan that was unfolding through the history of the chosen people. The reading from the prophet Jeremiah gives us a glimpse of the startling confidence of old Israel's faith. Though the people have lived through the horrors of defeat and exile, they must look forward, the prophet assures them, to a future filled with blessings ' –Shout with joy... Proclaim! Praise! Shout! The Lord has saved his people'.**

The story of Bartimaeus is often held up as one of the great healing miracles of Jesus. In the gospels Jesus transforms the lives of those on the margins and draws them into the center. But what if we saw this story as the crowd, the followers of Jesus, being blind and not Bartimaeus. The crowd in our gospel saw this blind beggar Bartimaeus as an annoyance, a distraction from the 'way things are done', disturbing Jesus as he preached God's kingdom. But Jesus skillfully moves him from the sidelines, recognizes his humanity and dignity and draws him closer to the centre. Bartimaeus wasn't blind where it really mattered. He had a perfect vision of what it meant to be a beloved child of God and as such, he insisted on being treated like a beloved child of God. Not even the crowd could hold him back and Jesus recognized him for his courage.

We as the church can quickly become like the crowd; blind to the needs of those sitting right outside our doors. How do we respond to the many Bartimaeuses in our own time? We show them to Jesus. Notice in the gospel the crowd is the first miracle of healing. The crowd is given their sight and actually sees Bartimaeus. And once their blindness is cured the crowd didn't pray for Bartimaeus, they didn't form a committee, or even have a theological discussion on the merits of Bartimaeus. The crowd saw him and showed him to Jesus and let Jesus do the rest. The same is true for us. We are called as followers of Jesus to first be healed of our blindness so that we can see clearly to invite others to share in Christ's healing.

There is a beautiful story about a man named Nicholas who lived on a lovely island in the Mediterranean Sea. He loved this island so much that when he grew old his greatest joy was just walking along the water, looking at the sea, the beaches, the rocks, and the white washed houses. When the time came for Nicholas' life to end, he asked his sons to carry him outside and lay him on the ground. As he was about to die, he reached down by his side and clutched some earth in his hand. Nicholas died a happy man. Now, immediately Nicholas reached the gates of heaven. God appeared to him in the guise of an old man with a long flowing beard. **"Nicholas," said God, "you were a good man on earth, come into the joys of heaven. Have faith and trust in me and follow me. You will be surprised what you will see. But you must let go of that earthly soil in your hand."** "Never," said Nicholas. So God departed, leaving Nicholas standing outside the pearly gates. After hundreds of heavenly years went by when God came to Nick again, this time in the company of Nicholas 'beautiful and favourite granddaughter. She stepped outside the pearly gates and called, **"Grandpa, Grandpa, I love you so much and miss you so much, I wish you were with us in heaven."** At that, Nick's heart melted. He gave his granddaughter such a big hug that the soil of his island in his hand slipped through his fingers. Then he walked through the pearly gates with his granddaughter holding hands. **The first thing he saw was his beautiful island where he and his favourite granddaughter used to run free holding hands. Smiling, God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food."** (Genesis 1:29)

Let us ponder these questions today and try to come to an honest conclusion. Bartimaeus gets his wish. **He asks, and he is answered. He knocks and the door is opened. Jesus calls him to himself and Bartimaeus jumps at the chance.** And after Bartimaeus expresses his request, Jesus tells him, as he has said to so many others: **"Go, your faith has made you well."** Can you imagine more wonderful words than these? No time passes. **The question is asked, the request is granted, and the sight is regained. Jesus tells him to go. But Bartimaeus stays with him. He stays with the crowd. He cannot be away from the source of his light. He is ready to follow Jesus from now on.** We don't know what happens to him after this. We don't know if he went all the way to Jerusalem to witness the triumphant entry and the agony of the passion. It is possible that, when the time came, he was one of the core of the first Christians. **Mark simply tells us that he regained his sight and followed him on the way. Let us also turn to the God of all lights to dispel the darkness, to restore our true spiritual vision and receive the sight that makes us see the Son of God in all his compassion and his mercy. And let us follow on the way, never falling by the wayside.** Because, as this story assured us, in the midst of the great crowd, each one of us, however small, poor or despised, matters to Jesus. Thanks be to God. **To enjoy the wonders of God's love for us, we have to have faith in Him and let Him lead the way. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me.** (John 14:6)