

THIRTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Gospel: Mark 10:46-52

They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said to him, "My teacher, let me see again." Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

REFLECTION 1:

BARTIMAEUS

The prophet Isaiah had foretold that signs such as the cure of the blind would herald the coming of the kingdom. Jesus recalled this fact in his preaching in Nazareth and also in response to the enquiries sent by John the Baptist. The four evangelists record healings of the blind but that of Bartimaeus, the account that we read today (Mark 10) is especially important in Mark's Gospel because of the contrast it poses with the attitude of the sons of Zebedee and their 'blindness' and lack of faith, which we read about last Sunday. This healing takes place when Jesus was leaving Jericho along with his disciples and a large crowd. This would be the last stage of a meandering journey, undertaken after the arrest of John the Baptist and coming to the end in Jerusalem.

Mark has already related the cure of a blind man in Bethsaida on the shore of the Lake of Galilee. At that time people had brought the man asking Jesus to touch him. The healing was performed almost in secrecy – Jesus had him led outside the village, he puts spittle on his eyes and he began to see and when he put his hands on his head the patient saw clearly. Then Jesus orders him not to go back into the village.

When Jesus leaves Jericho, everything happens very differently. The blind beggar, Bartimaeus, sitting by the roadside hears the noise of the crowd. He learns that Jesus is passing by and begins to cry out and say, 'Jesus son of David have pity on me'. Many rebuked him, telling him to be silent, but Bartimaeus kept calling out all the more, 'Son of David have pity on me'. Jesus stopped and said 'Call him'. So they called Bartimaeus, saying to him 'Take courage, get up, he is calling you'. Then Bartimaeus threw away his cloak that he probably used to collect the alms of the passerby. He sprang up and came to Jesus. A brief dialogue takes place. 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 Bartimaeus received his sight and followed him on the way.

Mark has used his narrative talents in this extraordinary vivid account. Now that we are close to Jerusalem, (The Paschal Mystery) we must all become aware that in a sense, we are all blind, failing to understand the mystery of Jesus. We must stop standing by the roadside and run towards the son of David, crying, 'Have pity on me' and go with him on the journey to Jerusalem. We must encourage the blind, eager to see, so that they too may confidently approach Jesus. Jesus invisible to the eyes of unbelievers walks in our ways. God is calling a great exodus, an immense gathering of those coming from the ends of the earth, crying out 'Save the remnant of your people' (First Reading). Jesus is walking on the road to Jerusalem; this is no time for us to remain sitting by the roadside, held captive by our blindness. We must cry out to him in prayer, asking for a cure so we can follow him to the source of life-

giving waters. 'Jesus is able to understand those who sin through ignorance or error. Let us proclaim God's praise and say: the Lord has delivered his people' (Second Reading).

REFLECTION 2:

SEEING AGAIN

Sometime around the year 1855, a builder by the name of John McCarthy went to the Granite Quarry of Ballyknockan. There he saw a rock pile of gleaming granite and from that moment onwards that gifted builder had a vision, not just of a granite quarry, but an exciting dream of a new church, the church we now know as the granite Church of Our Lady of Mercy, Crosschapel.

Today, through the graphic telling of the restoration of sight to the blind man Bartimaeus (Mk 10: 46-52), Jesus wants us to see again with a fresh vision. Bartimeaus says he wants to see once more. Obviously he once had sight but later became blind. Now he wants his sight restored. Let us visualise the scene.

The main road ran right through Jericho and Jesus was on his way to the Passover in Jerusalem. When a distinguished rabbi or teacher was on such a journey, he would be surrounded by a crowd of people who would listen to him as he walked and talked – the commonest way of teaching in those days. Those who were not going to the Passover would gather along the road and wish the pilgrims God speed on the way. They were also anxious to get a glimpse of this audacious Galilean who had pitted himself against the assembled might of orthodoxy. Bartimaeus heard the tramp of feet and asked what was happening and who was passing. He was told it was Jesus, so he set up an uproar to attract Jesus' attention to him. The crowd tried to silence him but to no avail, his persistence prevailed, the procession stopped and he was brought to Jesus. Bartimaeus knew precisely what he wanted – his sight back again. He was so eager that he cast off his cloak to run to Jesus more quickly. He addresses Jesus as Son of David, a messianic title, and a king of David's line that would lead Israel to national greatness.

Christianity begins with a personal relation to Jesus, a reaction of love, a feeling that here is the one person who meets our needs. Having received his sight anew, Bartimaeus follows Jesus. He didn't selfishly go on his way when his need was met. He began with need, went on to gratitude and finished with loyalty and that is a perfect summary of the stages of discipleship.

Today's Gospel might urge us to go out to our world and see once more with eyes of faith that Jesus resides in the person of our brothers and sisters. We are told that after the Transfiguration of Jesus on Mount Tabor, the disciples looked up and saw no one only Jesus. It's not an easy thing to do, but it's worth trying again with restored vision.