

### 30<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (YEAR B)

There are several lessons that we can draw out from today's healing of Bartimaeus which could easily be missed. Firstly, the context in Mark's gospel is that Jesus is coming to the end of his ministry in Galilee and in the regions closer to Jerusalem, and that Jericho is the last major stop on his journey to Jerusalem where he will be rejected by the Jewish religious authorities and crucified. When Bartimaeus is healed of his blindness, he follows Jesus along the road, which in fact would be a very difficult road. He may not have realised what was in store, but nevertheless Bartimaeus does not simply go off and live his own life with his sight restored, but rather having been touched by the love and power of Jesus, becomes his follower.

Secondly, and linked to this, is the fact that Bartimaeus is the only person in the gospel of Mark to refer to Jesus as 'Son of David', a title that draws attention to messianic ancestry of Jesus and is a preparation for the Lord's messianic entry into Jerusalem which comes shortly after this episode. I wonder whether this proclamation that Jesus is the 'Son of David' actually strengthened the Lord in his mission at the time, hearing from even a blind beggar the faith that could have only been imparted to Bartimaeus by the Father, for him to recognise Jesus as the Messiah.

Thirdly, and building on this second point, is the fact that in Mark's gospel, Jesus says 'Your faith has saved you' to only two people. The other time is to the woman with the haemorrhage who had crept up on Jesus in a crowd to touch his garment. As with that woman, Bartimaeus shows a faith that is courageous and persevering as he shouts all the more loudly when the people around him try to silence him. This determined and persevering faith is something that seems irresistible to Jesus. Both the woman with the haemorrhage and Bartimaeus appear to have the charism of faith that St. Paul speaks about in his first letter to the Corinthians, a gift of faith that brings with it a deep conviction that Jesus can help them in what might appear to others to be hopeless situations.

These are examples of persevering faith for us all. How easily do we give up in our prayers to the Lord for our loved ones, or for the difficult situations in which we find ourselves? We are inspired today to persevere in faith-filled prayer and entreaty of God and to not give up. The Lord always hears our prayers and answers them in His way and in His timing. It is through our desire and prayer that He prepares us to receive what He desires to give.

Another dimension that I would like to focus upon today is the fact that both Bartimaeus and the woman with the haemorrhage were persons on the edges of society. Pope Francis has asked the whole Church to enter into a time of listening, discernment and discussion of how we can be more pastorally sensitive and reach out to those who are on the edges of our society today. There may be people we know in our own lives whom the Church could serve better, but at present we do not have anything in place that provides such service. Bishop David has asked that parishes in our diocese engage in this Synodal process and feed back to him by February.

We already have initiatives in our parish that seek to reach out to those in need, such as in the work of our Justice and Peace group, or 'Young at Heart' which provides a service for those with dementia and their carers. How else might we reach out as a parish to those around us? I mentioned in my homily a few weeks ago that we could, as the parish of Holy Family and St. John, have a particular calling to promote and provide support for family life. It would be great if we could all think further about the gaps there may be in our pastoral support of individuals, and even have conversations with those who may feel on the edges of society or of the Church's life.

God bless,

Fr Andy