

Homily 30th Sunday, Year B: Jer 31:7-9; Heb 5:1-6; Mk 10:46-52

Introduction:

In today's Gospel, we meet a blind man by the name 'Bartimaeus'. When he met Jesus, his prayer was 'Lord that I may see'. It is a prayer which we can individually make our own because in many ways we too are blind. Jesus wants to open our eyes too. Bartimaeus journeyed on with Jesus after the healing. We are all invited to journey on with Jesus in our various life situations, never to waver, never to look back.

Homily

The first reading carries a message of joyful hope for the exiles in Babylon. The Lord will save what is left of his people and bring them back from exile. Even the most vulnerable will share in the Good news of this event. In Mark's mind, Jesus is the bearer of this good news, this salvation. His healing is a sign of both the presence and the coming of God's kingdom. The story of Bartimaeus is as much a call story as a healing story. Bartimaeus followed Jesus on the way of Christian discipleship after this healing. This lovely story of Bartimaeus was used in the early Church as a model of faith and encouragement. He is a model for us especially at those times when we are either blind, indecisive and lacking in focus and/or direction.

I have a short story to illustrate spiritual or psychological blindness. A Youngman who was born physically blind, fell in love with a girl. The more he got to know her, the more his love for her grew. He found her full of charm and wit. A beautiful friendship developed between them. The girl also loved him and did not mind his blindness at all. She was willing and in fact accepted to settle down in a marriage relationship with him. He proposed to her and she accepted. The boy's best friend would not hear of that. He thought that because the poor lad was blind, he should go for a girl who was blind. He gave him thousand and one reasons why the marriage would not work. However, the boy held on to his choice. He said to his friend: "You are the one who is blind". A physically blind person does not look at or judge physical appearances. Let us not forget that there is a difference between sight and insight.

In biblical times, blindness was very common. However, in today's world, modern medicine has eliminated many of the diseases that cause blindness. All kinds of devices have been invented to improve our seeing. We have ordinary devices, bifocals, magnifying glasses, field glasses, telescope, microscope, binoculars, etc. This notwithstanding, there are other forms of blindness that are very common in our world today and that we tend to forget or ignore. For instance, we acknowledge that we are blind or can be blind when we use the expressions: "Oooo, and it suddenly dawned on me...; I was completely in the dark." Is it possible that a blind person can see more than a sighted person, in the sense of having more insight or more understanding and more faith? St. Marks thinks it is possible and was actually applicable in his story. Blind Bartimeus had more insight, more focus, more understanding and more faith than Jesus' disciples who had perfect physical eyesight and were lacking in spiritual sight in that particular case. Whereas Bartimeus had no doubt, the disciples were full of doubt.

The sort of darkness which is worse than physical blindness is the darkness of unbelief or spiritual blindness. We find this among those who marginalize God or the sacred in their lives while extolling and exalting the profane. This is the great danger of our time. Our ancestors have held the deposit of faith and allowed themselves to be permeated with it, but in our own time, it is becoming increasingly a make belief and turning into a charade. Jesus is calling us today to take to heart the

need to see our spiritual blindness and seek for healing through him who alone knows how best to heal in a sustainable way. I like people who reflect true sight in their everyday life. They shine through and even illumine other lives also. There is one aspect of life that I have seen in people in my ministry that I admire so much, and that is putting fun to life and being resilient. There were two lovely couple who didn't have any children of their own but who have sponsored so many children all their lives. They gave me the honour of presiding over the celebration of their golden jubilee [50 yrs] of marriage. During the homily, I asked the man to tell me if he ever thought of divorcing his wife. He appeared shocked and said to me, divorce, I never thought of divorce. The day I married my wife, I know I had all my penance done, so I am heading straight to heaven as soon as I die. I asked his lady if she ever thought of divorce, she shook her head and said "not divorce but murder". It was such a very honest and comical response.

In Gal. 3:3. St Paul warns that we should beware of losing the faith we have inherited from childhood. In his own words he says: how can you who started in the spirit end up in the flesh? In 1 Cor 9:27, he warns us to be careful lest after saving other people we lose our own soul. In 1 Cor 1: 18ff, he warns us to think about our history and try to keep close to that initial calling/motivation. Bartimaeus was in darkness until he met Jesus, we are in darkness when we are insensitive, greedy, intolerant, individualistic, not loving, grabbing, etc. Let us make our own the heartfelt prayer of Bartimaeus, "Lord, that we may see", that we may see what is important in life.