

30th SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME – B (2021)

This is such a wonderful gospel, this encounter between Jesus and the blind Bartimaeus. Once he realizes that it is Jesus who is walking by, Bartimaeus cries out “Jesus, have pity on me. He had obviously heard about Jesus and his powerful deeds, and so he doesn’t hesitate to cry out for help.—even in the face of those who were trying to shut him up. When he hears that Jesus is calling him, Mark tells us that Bartimaeus “threw aside his cloak, sprang up, and came to Jesus”. No hesitation there whatsoever!

Then Jesus asks him the question: “what do you want me to do for you?” Now, that may sound like a bit of a silly question at first; certainly, Jesus had to know that Bartimaeus was blind and so he would naturally want his sight restored. But Jesus never did or said anything that was silly or pointless—his question is a very important one. He wanted to hear from Bartimaeus’ own lips what he wanted, and his answer came without hesitation: “Master, I want to see”...and it was given to him.

Imagine for a moment that Jesus appeared to you, physical person to physical person, as he did to Bartimaeus, and imagine Jesus asking you that very same question: “What do you want me to do for you?” What would be your answer? “Lord, I’d really like it if you help me win the lottery”? Or “could you make sure that my favorite team wins all its games?” On the less silly and the more serious level, we might well ask for healing of a disease or injury, or a loved one’s recovery from a serious illness or return to the practice of his/her faith, or for peace in the world and in the family. Those are good and worthy things to pray for, and I hope that we pray for those and other important intentions regularly, and—by the way—I hope we do so with the strong faith of Bartimaeus.

But I would like to suggest another response we could give to Jesus’ question of “what do you want me to do for you?” And that is: the same answer that Bartimaeus gave—“Master, I want to see.” I’m not talking only about visible sight with our bodily eyes; I’m talking more about the eyes of faith. Bartimaeus’ faith allowed him to entrust himself fully and completely to Jesus. He spoke of his desire for physical sight, of course, but he did so from the perspective of believing that Jesus could and would do for him what was best for him—he was willing to entrust himself to Jesus’ will for him and for his healing.

Jesus asks each of us ‘what do you want me to do for you?’; we answer ‘Master, I want to see’. Lord, I want to see what you want of me. St. Josemaria Escriva was the founder of Opus Dei which promotes the pursuit of holiness in everyday life for everyone. In reflecting on this story of Jesus restoring sight to Bartimaeus, St. Josemaria wrote: “[R]ealizing that Jesus was expecting something of me, though I myself did not know what it was, I made up my own aspirations: ‘Lord, what is it you want? What are you asking of me?’...the cry ‘Master, I want to see’ moved me to beseech Christ...whatever it is that you wish, let it be done.’”

To desire, to know, and to do the will of God is one of the most important elements of the spiritual life, of following Christ as his disciple. In fact, we pray for that every time we say the “Our Father”: “...thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” We pray that we will be able to see what God wants of us in life in general and in the particular decisions and

situations we face daily. That is a really important prayer, because we can be so easily tempted to think that what I want must naturally be what God wants for me. But ‘the world’ can lead us astray in so many ways by feeding into our self-centeredness that we can lose sight of what God wants for us and his challenge to ongoing conversion and growth in holiness.

One of the very best prayers to help us see what God wants of us personally and individually comes to us from St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit order (the Society of Jesus). It is called the “Suscipe”—Latin for ‘take’ or ‘accept’:

“Accept, O Lord, all my freedom. Accept my memory, my mind, and all my will. Whatever I am or possess you have graciously given me; I give it all back to you to be completely governed by your will. Give me only your love and your grace, and I am rich enough and I ask nothing more.”

I’ll have the full text of this prayer in my column in next weekend’s bulletin. I discovered this prayer back in the early 1980’s when I was thinking about priesthood but also going through those struggles and doubts about the faith that I’ve told you about. That prayer helped me so much to see that I needed to put myself into God’s hands more and more, to desire and do what he wanted of me rather than rely only on my thoughts and desires. To this day it remains part of my daily prayer time, and it always will be.

Again, imagine Jesus asking us the question he asked Bartimaeus: ‘what do you want me to do for you?’ Can we imagine answering that question like this: “Lord, I want to see...what you want of me, because that is what is truly best for me, even if it doesn’t always appear so on the surface right away. Help all of us, Lord, to desire you and to desire what you want for each of us. Master, we want to see!”