

## **Homily for the 30<sup>th</sup> Sunday, Oct. 25, 2009**

**Intro:** Mark was probably the first gospel written. The author was not one of the earliest disciples; he received oral reports & written traditions about Jesus which he put in a coherent theological story to teach his community to live as Jesus did.

The middle section of Mark begins with the healing of a blind man slowly, in stages, which symbolizes the opening of his disciples' eyes to who Jesus really was. Right after the healing of that blind man, Peter proclaims that Jesus is the Messiah who would lead the Jews to triumph over their pagan oppressors. But Jesus corrects that blindness, predicting that the Son of Man would have to suffer and die for his message before he would rise from the dead. Further, he taught that all his disciples would have to give up their own lives in service to others. Throughout these three chapters which form the central part of Mark's gospel the disciples seem blind and deaf to Jesus' message. Finally, Jesus at the end of this section proclaims once again his own view of his identity---"The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many." Mark then concludes this section with a second healing of a blind man, which echoes the first healing which opened the section. It is elegant composition!

**Mark:** Today's gospel, then, echoes and contrasts with the first healing of a blind man. In the first one, disciples bring an anonymous blind man to Jesus. He takes him outside the village and uses his spittle to heal him. When he is healed in stages Jesus sends him home, telling him not to return to his own village.

In today's healing, Jesus is leaving Jericho for Jerusalem, only 15 miles away. We know the name of the man, Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus. Because he is blind he is doomed to be a beggar. The disciples don't bring him to Jesus; rather they are part of the crowd telling him to shut up. But the man knows Jesus is his last chance, and he proclaims his faith in the messianic healer, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" When Jesus summons him, he throws off his only worthwhile clothing, springs up, and finds his way to Jesus. These are the acts of Jesus' first disciples in Mark. As he had done for James and John, Jesus asks him, "What do you want me to do for you?" Bartimaeus is decisive: "My master, I want to see." Without any need for saliva or any other touch, Jesus tells him, "Go your way, your faith had saved you," and immediately he receives his sight. But instead of going on his way, he goes on Jesus' way, to Jesus' suffering and death in Jerusalem. Bartimaeus concludes this section with the sight and the action of a disciple, unswerving and immediately following Jesus.

**The Meaning for us:**

1. *When Jesus calls, leave everything and come.* This is the principal message not only of this gospel but of the Bible as a whole. God is the source of every good gift, and Jesus spells out for us how we open ourselves to God's good gifts. When you are inspired to some great generosity, be predisposed to say "Yes!" If you test the inspiration in prayer and it turns out to come from some source other than God (building our "image," or in hopes of getting something better in return), then you might reconsider. But presuppose that God is asking you to make a leap of faith in following him. Following Jesus more closely is the greatest gift anyone could have in this life.

2. *Jesus will heal us of our blindness.* Of course, we all see, physically. But most of us have some major spiritual blindness from which we need to be healed:

It may be blindness to the sin of our world, which we take for "normal":

- Our own sins, which keep us compassionate forgiveness and care for others;
- Secular rationalism which tries to eliminate faith, the supernatural, sinfulness;
- Exploitation of sexuality in pornography and sexual slavery of any kind;
- Disregard for human life, especially of the unborn and those on the cusp of death, but also for the disadvantaged and disposed everywhere in between;
- Justification of violence as justice everywhere in our world;
- Economic disparity between the super rich and the desperately poor;
- The waywardness of our own pilgrim church, always in need of reform.

Our spiritual blindness may be blindness to the presence of God in our world:

- To God in his creatures, and especially in our fellow human beings;
- To God in human inventions, in art and music;
- To God at work even in the reversals, the "downs" of our lives;
- To God in people of diverse ethnicity, sexual orientation;
- To Jesus' prophetic call to us to our change our thinking and our lives;
- To the authentic teaching of our Church, especially in regard to sex, economics, politics;

The greatest spiritual blindness is our inability to see God as the ultimate, indeed, the only reality of our lives.

3. There are so many other blindnesses. Ask yourself, as you sit by the side of the road begging, *what is your spiritual blindness?* What attachment in your life keeps you from seeing the log in your eye? You must be able to name that blindness when Jesus asks you, "What do you want me to do for you?" If you know it, you too will ask in faith, "Master, that I might see." Then Jesus will be able to cure you. That is the good news.