

# Homily for the 30<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year B

October 27, 2024

St. Bavo Parish

Rev. Peter J. Pacini, C.S.C.

*First Reading: Jeremiah 31:7-9 (The blind will be among those who return from exile.)*

*Responsory: Psalm 126 (The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.)*

*Second Reading: Hebrews 5:1-6 (Christ the High Priest.)*

*Gospel: Mark 10:46-52 (Healing of the blind beggar, Bartimaeus.)*

Today, Jesus is fast approaching the completion of his mission. He's passing through Jericho and beginning the long ascent through the desert wilderness to Mount Zion, where he will suffer and die. Yet, as we have seen in recent weeks, Jesus' disciples are still clueless about what lies ahead, because they still do not see very clearly who Jesus is. Only one person appears to see Jesus clearly, and, ironically, he's *blind*.

When the blind beggar, Bartimaeus, hears that Jesus is passing by, he immediately starts calling out, "Jesus, son of David, have pity on me!" *Son of David* is a very important messianic title. It reflects the belief, universally held among the Jews, that their Messiah would be a direct descendant of King David. He would inherit his father's kingdom, which had come to an abrupt end when Jerusalem fell to foreign invaders centuries earlier. Furthermore, according to God's promise, his kingdom, once re-established, would last forever. Bartimaeus is the first person in Mark's Gospel to apply this title to Jesus. Hence, he is the first person to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah. And, he does so repeatedly. He continues to cry out, "Son of David, have pity on me!" even as the people in the crowd keep telling him to be silent. Bartimaeus will not be silenced, and he will not be denied his opportunity to meet the long-awaited Son of David and present his need.

Once Jesus takes notice of Bartimaeus and calls him, the blind beggar instantly springs up and throws aside the cloak that he had been using to gather alms. He is ready to abandon his life of begging and put all his trust in the Lord. Jesus asks him the same question that he asked James and John last week: "What do you want me to do for you?" But, Bartimaeus doesn't have his head in the clouds, thinking about the honors that he wants to enjoy later, in Jesus' kingdom. He is focused on the present moment. He wants to *see*. He wants his obstacles removed so that he can pursue the life that God has in store for him. And, once Jesus heals him and tells him to go on his way, Bartimaeus begins to follow Jesus on *his* way. Now that he is free to make a choice, he chooses to become Jesus' disciple.

I can't help wondering if following Jesus is what Bartimaeus wanted all along. He certainly seemed ready and eager to jump at his chance the moment that it was presented to him. Yet, he was inhibited by his blindness. As long as his affliction remained, all he could do was sit by the roadside and beg. In order to follow Jesus, he first needed Jesus to grant him the ability to see.

This man's life-changing encounter with Jesus can serve as a parable for all of us who long to follow Jesus, but often find ourselves impeded by our own *spiritual* blindness. We human beings possess an astonishing capacity for self-deception. This blind beggar-turned-

disciple reminds us that the path of discipleship is a path toward ever greater *self-awareness* and an ever truer *vision of God*. To follow Jesus we must learn to see clearly. The more we can free ourselves from false images of God and false images of ourselves, the more fully we can share in Jesus' life and participate in his saving mission.

Our first images of God are formed very early in life. Since all of us are taught from an early age to think of God as our Heavenly Father, we naturally form an image of God that conforms to what we see in our parents. If they are loving and compassionate, then we naturally assume that God also is loving and compassionate. On the other hand, if our parents are angry, judgmental or distant, we can easily assume that God is like *that*. If the lessons that our parents teach us about God match what we see in them, then our initial image of God tends to get cemented firmly in place, regardless of how true or false it might be. For example, if our parents teach us that God is love, and we see nothing but unconditional love in our own household as we're growing up, then we are likely to reach adulthood with a very positive image of God. On the other hand, if our parents teach us that God punishes sinners and withholds his love from them, and if we see our parents as exemplars of that harsh discipline which they ascribe to God, then we are likely to develop an unhealthy fear of God, which can stay with us throughout life. Unfortunately, many children growing up in Catholic families hear all the right messages about a loving God but then see examples at home which conflict with those teachings. As a result, they can be left confused, not knowing what to believe.

Just as our image of God is formed very early, so is our image of *self*. The way that other people treat us when we are very young tends to form an image of self that sticks with us, whether or not it accords with reality. For example, if we regularly experience unconditional love as children, then we come to believe that we are lovable and precious in God's eyes. But, if we are abused, bullied, or constantly insulted or demeaned, we can come to believe that we are unworthy of God's love, or anyone else's love.

Personal holiness and faithful discipleship both depend on seeing clearly. And the Scriptures, especially the *gospels*, are often our best corrective lenses. When we notice a conflict between the Jesus that we meet in Scripture and the image of God that we have come to believe, that tension within us should move us to question our assumptions and seek to know the Lord more intimately (and more *truthfully*). Likewise, if we hear Jesus describe his Father's attitude toward his wayward children and we doubt that we are worthy of such compassion and mercy, that may be a sign that we don't see ourselves as God sees us.

Self-awareness and a true knowledge of God do not come easily or automatically, but they are the keys to faithful discipleship. Such insight requires divine grace, coupled with humility and honesty. First, we must recognize and admit our own blindness and truly desire to see more clearly. Then, we must be willing to turn to the Lord and ask for help. Like Bartimaeus, we should not be afraid to approach Jesus and say, "Master, I want to see." He will free us to go on our way, healed of our affliction. Then, the choice will be ours, to follow *him* as his disciples.