

THIRTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME-OCTOBER 24, 2021

**READINGS: Jeremiah 31:7-9;
Responsorial Psalm-Psalm 126;
Hebrews 5:1-6;
Gospel of Mark 10:46-52**

Following Jesus on his path full of light and love

We begin our reflection with a question. If someone were to ask you to describe your discipleship way of life, what would you tell the person? As Christians our understanding of the discipleship way of life may be different for each person. Over the past few Sundays, the readings from the Gospel of Mark have been focused on Jesus' teaching about the discipleship way of life. On this Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Jesus continues his teaching about some of the requirements for living the discipleship way of life. Today's Gospel passage picks up from where we read last Sunday about the rich young man. The passage begins with these words, "As Jesus and his disciples and a crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside." When Bartimaeus heard that Jesus was passing, he cried out to Jesus for help. The expression "Son of David" is a messianic title connected to the Davidic kingship. By referring to Jesus as "Son of David", Bartimaeus understood Jesus' identity for it was the first time in the Gospel that anyone has identified Jesus as "Son of David." The use of the title is connected with the healing power of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark. Some of the people wanted Bartimaeus to shut up. However, Bartimaeus' faith in Jesus encouraged him to continue to ignore the crowd. It is interesting to note that when Jesus called for Bartimaeus to come over to him, Jesus asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus knew exactly what the blind man needed from him. However, it seemed Jesus wanted the crowd, of whom some were telling Bartimaeus to shut up-- to hear Bartimaeus' request for help. We hear that Jesus healed the blind man. Jesus told Bartimaeus, "Go: your faith has made you well." When the man regained his sight, he didn't go away. He "followed Jesus on the way."

The story about Bartimaeus leads us to the first reading from the Book of the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah was a prophet while the Israelites were in exile in Babylon. The Babylonians had conquered the Israelites, destroyed their temple and ravaged their land. Today's oracle was a message of hope that the prophet offered to his fellow Israelites. The passage begins with, "Thus says the Lord: Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, 'Save o Lord your people, the remnant of Israel.'" The name "Jacob" refers to the nation Israel. Jacob was one of the early patriarchs and the nation of Israel as a whole was often referred to by the name of this tribal leader. The expression "the remnant of Israel" refers to those who were not killed by the Babylonians but instead were sent to Babylon.

The oracle describes how God would bring the exiles back to their land. God would lead the exiles safely to their homeland. In today's oracle, the prophet alluded to the Exodus story. However, unlike the rough road on which the Israelites travelled in the Exodus story, here God will lead them on a level road, providing an easier journey. God is described as a loving father to Israel "with Ephraim as the firstborn." In Chapter 41 of the Book of Genesis, we read that Ephraim was the second son of Joseph, the son of Jacob. The meaning of Ephraim is "fruitful" (Gen. 41:50-53). Ephraim became one of the twelve tribes of Israel. The tribe of Ephraim led the ten northern tribes in a successful revolt against the southern kingdom and established the Kingdom of Israel. The name "Ephraim" is used to describe the people of Israel.

When we examine the first reading and the Gospel passage, we can see some similarities between them. In the first reading God would make smooth the journey of the Israelites to their homeland. According to the oracle, even the most helpless such as the blind, the lame and those in labour would be able to make a safe journey together. Everybody including the helpless will share in this great event. In the Gospel, Jesus healed a blind man who was able to join the crowd on their journey. What Jesus did in the Gospel is what only God can do.

The second reading from the Letter to the Hebrews can be described as a summary of the first reading and the Gospel passage. The writer compared the high priest of the Jewish people to Jesus. He described the Jewish high priest as being chosen by God "to offer gifts and sacrifices for sin." In using the expression "to offer gifts and sacrifices for sin", the writer was thinking principally of the Day of Atonement in the Old Testament. This ritual was celebrated to atone for all the sins of the Israelites (Leviticus 16:34). The high priest was expected to deal patiently with his people because he himself was weak and sinful. The writer of the Letter then cited from Hebrew Scriptures to show that Jesus' mission as a high priest surpassed that of the Jewish priests: Jesus had been tempted but remained without sin, he was specially called by God to be a high priest, "according to the order of Melchizedek." Melchizedek appears in Genesis as "a priest of God Most High" who brought bread and wine and blessed Abraham after a victory in battle (Genesis 14:18-20). Melchizedek became the symbol for eternal priesthood. In today's Gospel, Jesus' mission is revealed through his compassion, mercy and love.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, we have gathered to celebrate the Eucharist. What do we hear from the three readings about the discipleship way of life? Even though the Gospel reading is about the physical healing of a blind man, it also talks to us about the faith of the blind man. Bartimaeus was blind, but he already had faith in Jesus. When he was able to see, he chose to become a disciple. As Christians we are on the journey of faith with Jesus as our leader. We are on the road of true discipleship. For some people this process of faith development may occur in their youth; for others, their faith develops over years. We may also encounter challenges on our faith journey, challenges that may come to us in different aspects of our lives. Yet, today's readings offer us hope and encourage us to continue to follow the way of the Lord. To follow the way of the Lord is to love and to show compassion. As we come to receive the Eucharist let us ask God to lead us on his path full of light and love.

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