

30th Sunday in Ordinary Time (B-2021)
St. Patrick – Milford

To fully appreciate today's gospel in which Jesus heals the beggar Bartimaeus, we should remember last week's gospel in which Jesus has a conversation with the apostles James and John. In both gospels Jesus asks the exact same question, "What do you want me to do for you?". But, the answers in the two gospels are very different. James and John ask that they sit at Jesus' right and left when he comes into his glory. Bartimaeus says, "Master I want to see." James and John ask for glory and power. Bartimaeus asks for sight and understanding. Jesus tells James and John that he cannot grant their request, but he immediately responds to Bartimaeus, and the beggar receives his sight.

When we place these two gospels side by side, they tell us that sight is more important than glory, that understanding is more to be desired than power. And, this is an important message because you and I, like James and John, are attracted to power. We seek the ability to make things happen, to get things done.

We want the power to bring about that which is good. We look at our children and say, "I want to make sure that they grow into mature and successful adults." We look at someone we care for who is struggling with addiction and say, "I want this addiction to end."

Today's gospel tells us that before we ask Jesus for the power to do those things, we should first ask to see. We should see our children as the gifted and unique people that they are, because if we can love them as they are today, it is more likely that they will grow into the adults they need to be. We should see the person who is struggling with addiction as someone captive to fear and shame, because if we can recognize what enslaves a person and stand with them in their brokenness, it is more likely that they will be successful in recovery.

We look at the partisan divisions that are destroying our democracy, the way that personal attacks substitute for public discourse, and we want it to stop. We long for a country characterized by civility and honest debate. We look at the scandal in our church of sexual abuse, and we want it to go away.

Today's gospel tells us that before we ask for the power to do something, we should ask for the ability to see—to see the anger and prejudice that fuel the political divide, to see the weakness and sinfulness that allow sexual abuse to continue. It is only when we see and understand the brokenness of our political and church systems that we will be able to rebuild them.

So, what does the Lord want us to go home and think about this week? Today's gospel issues a personal appeal to each of us: "Take courage; get up, Jesus is calling you." The blind beggar, Bartimaeus, calls out to Jesus from the side of the road as Jesus passes through Jericho. He continues to call, "Jesus . . . have pity on me," even after being rebuked by others in the crowd. And then when Jesus issues the command, "Call him," the message of the crowd becomes different: "Take courage; get up, Jesus is calling you."

As the savior and the Lord, Jesus calls us to be more than we are at this moment. Though he loves us exactly as we are, he also dreams that we will embrace the “fullness of life.” And this fullness of life requires conversion and change. It seems the crowd knows this. When Bartimaeus is called forth, he draws near to an encounter that will transform everything in his life. He will stop being someone who must rely on others to lead him and provide for his needs and become an individual who can make his own choices and chart his own course.

When Bartimaeus stands in front of Jesus, the Lord asks him, “What do you want me to do for you?” And when Bartimaeus responds, “I want to see,” Jesus immediately restores his sight. Jesus’s parting words to Bartimaeus are, “Go your way.” But instead, Bartimaeus follows Jesus on the road that leads to Jerusalem and Jesus’s passion, death, and resurrection. Doubtless, in the days to come as he witnesses the man who had healed him be arrested, tortured, and put to death, Bartimaeus will need the courage that he relied on to stand up, throw off his beggar’s cloak, and make his request of Jesus. It is the same courage we all need to answer Jesus’s call and to follow him on the path that leads to life eternal.