

Homily for thirtieth Sunday of the year, b cycle October 24, 2021

September 11, 2001 was indisputably a day of infamy for our nation. Thousands lost their lives in separate terrorist attacks. In Mid-town Manhattan the huge World Trade Center buildings collapsed into piles of rubble. Yet in the midst of mayhem and death, there were many outstanding acts of courage and selflessness.

In one instance smoke was blinding people in a subway station near Ground Zero as commuters tried to work their way up the stairs to the light and fresh air. They had no idea what was going on at first and they panicked because they were temporarily blinded by the smoke.

One man raised his voice to calm them down. He took hold of each of them by the hand and led them up the stairs to safety by the only route he knew.

The man was blind and enjoyed the support of his seeing-eye dog.

Time and again, these commuters had seen the man and pitied him for his blindness. But in that crisis, he was the only one who could really see.

IN today's gospel we meet Bartimaeus, a blind roadside beggar. He manages to survive on the mercy and generosity of others. He hopes to earn enough so as to live another day.

Though blind, he sees Jesus more clearly than the crowd and the disciples do. The disciples, in particular, suffer from spiritual blindness and a lack of faith. Bartimaeus symbolically breaks with his past and runs to Jesus, the Light of the world. He is the only one in Mark's gospel to call Jesus "Son of David", a royal title.

It is worth noting that after Bartimaeus calls out to Jesus, people try to silence him, but to no avail. The blind man was even more determined to approach Our Lord.

How many today are enraged upon hearing the Sacred name of Jesus and demand that his name not be mentioned?

Spiritual blindness is an affliction of the modern world.

During World War II, the German architect Albert Speer, was a member of Adolf Hitler's inner circle and played a key role in implementing the tyrant's despicable policies. After the German surrender, Speer was arrested, put on trial, and convicted of war crimes. Although he was spared the sentence of death, he was still sentenced to a long prison sentence. While serving time in prison he wrote his memoirs, in which he made a candid confession that he made the choice to be blind. He closed his eyes to injustices around him, especially the deportation of innocent victims, especially Jews.

Do we often close our eyes, too? Do we look at the photographic images of the pre-born child in the womb of its mother? Do we turn away from the painful images of those who are impoverished and seeking a better life for themselves? Are we blind to the plight of the homeless, who are likely mentally ill?

In John's gospel, Jesus speaks words of censure to his adversaries: "It is for judgment that I came into this world so that those without sight may see and those with sight may become blind"

A question posed by Jesus in today's gospel is addressed to each one of us, namely, "What do you want me to do for you?"

What would we ask for? Wealth? Power? Influence? An acknowledgement of our talents?

The blind man only asked to see. He longed for light and for the right path, a path a blind person cannot find. He longs for the path that leads to God.

Bartimaeus leaves behind his cloak, likely his only earthly possession. It is a sign that he leaves everything behind in order to follow Jesus.

At the end of the narrative, we hear that Bartimaeus followed Jesus on the way. The Evangelist, Mark, wants his readers to know that the man healed of his blindness is now a follower of Christ.

Lord, we pray that you open our eyes that we may see clearly and act courageously.