

COMMIT - DAY 1: JESUS HEALS A BLIND MAN

“And they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to him a blind man, and begged him to touch him” (Mark 8:22). We can read the account of this healing in Mark 8:22-26 on its own and harvest much wisdom from it. But it is also helpful to take a step back and look at this healing in the larger context of the Gospel. In fact, the Church does this when she present short selections from the Scriptures each day at Mass. With the exception of feast days when readings are chosen for the particular feast, we get a short periscope (from the Greek *peri* + *kopē*, a cutting around”) each day from one Gospels, but with each successive day we continue to read, passage by passage, through the Gospel as a whole. Thus, we are able to see these individual episodes beautifully strung together. Much like a string of pearls, we are able to relish the individual gem while also not missing the beauty of the entire necklace of which it is an integral part.

We see such a “string of pearls” when we take a moment to look at the healing of the blind man in Mark 8:22-26 in light of the previous chapters of Mark’s Gospel that we covered in the last session. In Mark 6, Jesus multiplies the loaves and fishes to feed a multitude and walks on the sea-both signs that should impress his divinity upon the minds and hearts of his disciples. By the time that Jesus repeats the miracle of the multiplication of loaves and fishes a second time in Mark 8, one would expect the disciples to be on board. But in fact, Jesus continues to find that his disciples’ understanding is lacking. When Jesus teaches against the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod, the disciples are quickly distracted, and their focus turns to a discussion on physical bread.

Look up Mark 8:16-21. What questions does Jesus pose to the disciples in his frustration?

It is not an accident that Mark frames the episode of the second multiplication of loaves and fishes and Jesus’s calling out of his disciples as deaf, blind, and not understanding with two healings: the first before the multiplication, Jesus heals a deaf man (see Mark 7:33-37), and the second after the multiplication, Jesus heals the blind man (see Mark 8:22-26). Mark drives home for his readers that the disciples do not hear, see, or understand.

The two healings are connected as a framing device. If we go back and reread the two healings, we find the events are strikingly similar: they occur in the same location-the region of the Decapolis and the town of Bethsaida, which is located in the region of the Decapolis; they contain similar actions-Jesus takes the person to be healed off by themselves and he uses touch, spit, and words as part of the healing process; Christ also give similar directions-after the healing has taken place, they are told to tell no one, or not to return to the town.

But in addition to simply framing the story of the miracle of multiplication, the second healing adds additional important information. Unlike other healings, this is a two-stage healing, a fact that does not escape the disciples. How is it that Jesus, the Son of God, fails to heal the blind man on the first try? The reader can be tempted to blame the blind man: he doesn’t have enough faith. But there is nothing in the narrative to warrant this. A better explanation might be that Jesus heals in two stages to indicate that the healing of his own disciples’ deafness, blindness, and lack of understanding will happen in stages.

With its multiple stages, this miracle is encouraging for those who seek to follow Jesus and find themselves sometimes feeling like they’re in the dark. Even when the disciples are unsure or confused, they continue to follow closely to Jesus, and because of this they will come to fully understand. Notice also that Jesus cures the deaf man and blind man with both words and deeds, a pattern that is continued in the seven sacraments of the Church.



“Through the institution of the sacraments man, consistently with his nature, is instructed through sensible things; he is humbled through confessing that he is subject to corporeal things, seeing that he receives assistance through them: and he is even preserved from bodily hurt, by the healthy exercise of the sacraments.”

*-Saint Thomas Aquinas,
Summa Theologica*

As we conclude today, take a moment to reflect on the following question. Are there areas in your life where things look like “trees walking”? Are you inclined to be discouraged at the confusion? Are you willing to patiently follow Jesus and wait for him to work in your life?

COMMIT - DAY 2: THE WAY OF DISCIPLESHIP

The healing of the blind man in Mark 8:22-26 sets up the central section of Mark’s Gospel. This section opens and closes by repeating the phrase “on the way” (Mark 8:27 and 10:52). In this section, Jesus will travel from the far northern town of Caesarea Philippi down to Jerusalem, which he will enter on Palm Sunday, and where less than a week later he will die on the Cross. For Jesus, who is fully aware of what is ahead, this “way” on which he travels with his disciples is the way leading to the Cross. As Jesus travels this way, we see him laboring to heal the myopic, nearsighted vision of his disciples.

The section begins in Caesarea Philippi, where Jesus asks his disciples a decisive question: “Who do you say that I am?” (Mark 8:29). Saint Peter, even with his blindness, is given a revelation from the Father (see Matthew 16:17) and replies, “You are the Christ” (Mark 8:29; Matthew 16:16).

Jesus’s disciples have been following behind Jesus for the three years of his ministry, listening to him teach, questioning him to explain his teachings and parables further, and watching him heal the sick, raise the dead and cast out evil spirits. They see and understand more than many around them because they have come to believe that Jesus is the promised Messiah. Yet, they are still deaf and blind in that they understand Jesus’s Messiah-ship from a worldly standpoint. When they look at Jesus, the Messiah, they can only see a new Davidic king who will reign for a time in glory in Jerusalem-like the blind man for whom men looked “like trees, walking,” the disciples see Jesus but not clearly, not fully.

Thus, we begin to see the need for a two-stage healing of their blindness so that they can see Jesus clearly, and hear and understand fully all that Jesus is saying. The disciples need *metanoia*, a changing of the mind. The disciples need their way of thinking transformed. As they travel “on the way,” Jesus seeks to lead them to a divine understanding.

As Jesus and the disciples travel on the way, Jesus gives three predictions of the Passion, each prediction becoming more specific. All three predictions and the narrative following them follow a similar

pattern: 1) Jesus predicts his Passion; 2) rejection on the part of the disciples; and 3) teaching on the nature of discipleship and Christ's Kingship.

Look up the following three passages. How do the disciples respond to Jesus's prediction? What further teaching does Jesus give?

Passage	Prediction	Disciples' Response	Further Teaching
Mark 8:31-38	"The son of man must suffer... be killed... rise again		
Mark 9:30-37	"The Son of man will be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him; and when he is killed, after three days he will rise."		
Mark 10:32-45	"Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and deliver him to the Gentiles; and they will mock him, and spit upon him, and scourge him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise."		

At the heart of Jesus's teaching is the truth that discipleship is cruciform. Those who follow Jesus follow the suffering Servant along the way of the Cross. He is not preaching a "prosperity gospel." Our Lord is far more ambitious for us. In his words and life, Jesus shows us the royal dignity of service, and calls us to follow him "on the way" of the Cross so that we can share in his glory, the glory of self-giving love.

The Cross is demanding doctrine, and the disciples' lack of understanding is not completely unexpected. We want to avoid this same deafness, blindness, and lack of understanding in our own lives. As today's study concludes, ask yourself: How do I respond to our Lord's assurance that he will suffer and so will all who follow him? With fear? With faith? If I do not understand, do I pull back, or do I turn to Jesus with my trouble? Ask Mary, the Mother of Jesus and your Mother as well, to help you not to run from the Cross.

"Jesus did not come to explain away suffering, or to remove it. He came to fill it with His presence."

-French poet Paul Claudel

COMMIT - DAY 3: LECTIO: REQUEST OF JAMES

As Jesus and his disciples travel on the way, Jesus predicts his Passion and what is going to happen once they are in Jerusalem. But the Apostles clearly have their own thoughts about the glory that awaits Jesus. This is so much the case that James and John make an unexpected request of the Lord – a request that opens the way for Jesus to once again teach about Christian leadership and discipleship.

LECTIO: The practice of praying with Scripture begins with an active and close reading of the Scripture passage. Read the verse below and then answer the questions to take a closer look at some of the details of the passage.

“And James and John, the sons of Zeb’edee, came forward to him and said to him, ‘Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.’ And he said to them, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ And they said to him, ‘Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.’ But Jesus said to them, ‘You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?’ And they said to him, ‘We are able.’ And Jesus said to them, ‘The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.’ And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. And Jesus called them to him and said to them, ‘You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”.

-Mark 10:35-45

Who makes the request? Why do you think these two disciples are the ones to make such a request?

What title do they use for Jesus when they make their request?

When do they want their request to be granted?

How does Jesus respond to his disciples’ request?

MEDITATIO: *Lectio*, a close reading and rereading is followed by *meditation*, a time to reflect on the Scripture passage and to ponder the reasons for particular events, descriptions, details, phrases, and even echoes from other Scripture passages that were noticed during *lectio*. Take some time now to meditate on the above verse.

“Christ defines his saving mission as a service whose highest expression will be the sacrifice of his life for mankind: ‘For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many’ (Mk 10:45; Mt 20:28). These words, spoken to counter the disciples’ tendency to seek

the first place in the kingdom, are primarily meant to awaken in them a new mentality, which conforms more closely to that of the Teacher.... As a divine person, [Jesus] would be fully entitled to be served. But in saying he had 'come to serve', he shows a disturbing aspect of God's behavior: although he has the right and the power to make himself served, he puts himself 'at the service' of his creatures. Jesus expresses this desire to serve in an eloquent and moving way at the Last Supper when he washes his disciples' feet: a symbolic act which will be impressed as a rule of life on their memory for ever: 'You also ought to wash one another's feet' (John 13:14)."

- Pope St. John Paul II, General Audience, February 4, 1998

To what chalice or cup does Jesus refer? See Jeramiah 25:15; Psalm 75:8; John 18:11; and Mark 14:36.

ORATIO, CONTEMPLATIO, RESOLUTIO: Having read and meditates on today's Scripture passage, take some time to pray – bringing your thoughts to God (*oratio*) – and to be receptive to God's grace in silence (*contemplation*). Then end your prayer by making a simple concrete resolution (*resolution*) to respond to God's prompting of you heart in today's prayer.

COMMIT - DAY 4: BARTIMAEUS RECEIVES HIS SIGHT

The center section of Mark's Gospel begins and ends with the healing of two blind men. The healing of the blind man in Mark 8:22-26 introduces the "way" section of the Gospel, and now as that section comes to an end Jesus will heal the blind beggar Bartimaeus (see Mark 1:-46-52). This is one of the most beautiful healings in the Gospels, and it provides a wonderful insight into the heart of a true disciple.

Let's look at the who, what, where, when, and why of the passage. First off, what do we know about the man who is healed? He is blind. He is a beggar. He lives outside Jericho. His name is Bartimaeus, and he is the son of Timaeus. Mak does not tell us names of many people who are healed, but he does mention this name. Perhaps this is one of the details that Peter remembered specially.

There may be another reason though. The name Barimaeus is a combination Hebrew-Greek word, meaning "son of the honored or precious one." And here is an interesting point: the man who is specifically described as 'an heir of an honored or precious person' is begging. Not only is he impoverished, but he is also handicapped in such a way as to prevent his ever rising in the world. Does this remind you of anyone? In the story of salvation, who is the beggared and maimed child of an honored father? It's us. Penniless and broken, unable to help ourselves, and yet still the children of God.

This miracle takes place outside of Jericho. Mark makes a point of the location, mentioning it twice in the same verse. It is also the only time the city is mentioned by name, although Jesus has been near there before, The Jordan River near Jericho is the traditional site of Jesus's baptism. Having traveled "on the way" from Caesarea Philippi, around the Sea of Galilee and likely south along the Jordan valley, now that Jesus has reached Jericho, his way turns west as he heads up to Mount Zion and Jerusalem. What happens outside Jericho is a sequence of events illustrating in miniature the process of discipleship. Jesus is nearby with a crowd, which is surely making plenty of noise. The beggared blind man is neither deaf nor dumb. He uses what powers he has and calls out for help. How does Bartimaeus call to Jesus? What does he ask for? And What does Jesus say in reply?

Those following Jesus have been trying to keep Bartimaeus quiet, but at the Lord's command they call the beggar and encourage him. "Take heart," they say, recalling the words of Jesus himself as he walked on the sea. "Rise." And why? Because the Lord is calling.

Bartimaeus is being called. He promptly responds with cheerfulness and trust. He leaves behind his cloak, showing his hope in Christ, for he is not clinging to a material possession. Once he stands before Jesus, his mode of address changes. What does Bartimaeus call Jesus when he speaks face to face with him? Look up these other places where Jesus is called "Master": Mark 9:5; and 14:45. Who uses the phrase?

Bartimaeus addresses Jesus as a disciple would. And Jesus addresses Bartimaeus as he addresses his disciples. In fact, he uses exactly the same phrase as he used for James and John a few verses before: "What do you want me to do for you?" (Mark 10:36, 51). But while James and John do not yet understand what they are asking, Bartimaeus asks for just the right thing. The physical sight he receives enables him to express the spiritual sight he has already been given. "Go your way," says Jesus, "your faith has made you well." And Mark records that Bartimaeus "followed [Jesus] on the way" (10:52).

Origen writes, *"It is more worthy to say Rabboni, or, as it is in other places, Master, than to say Son of David; wherefore He gives him health, not on his saying Son of David, but when he said Rabboni."*

-quoted by Thomas Aquinas in *Catena Aurea*

The story of Bartimaeus highlights the ingredients for a good disciple. Awareness of our helplessness and humility to beg for mercy can prepare us, like Bartimaeus, to respond wholeheartedly when Jesus calls. Bartimaeus's continual calling out for Jesus, even when those around him rebuke him, is a lesson in faith and perseverance. And choosing that "our way" will be to follow behind Jesus "on the way" is truly the way of Christian discipleship.

As we conclude, let us ask God to open our eyes so that we see Jesus clearly. Let us pray that the trials of our lives may make us quick to call upon the mercy of God and eager to receive it when it comes. Ad may this mercy strengthen us to follow Jesus "on the way."

COMMIT – DAY 5: TRUTH AND BEAUTY



Christ and the Rich Young Ruler,

Heinrich Hofmann, 1889, Riverside Church, New York, NY

Heinrich Hofmann was a nineteenth- and early twentieth-century German painter, best known for his paintings of the life of Christ, which he began painting after the death of his beloved mother. Three of Hofmann's paintings were donated to The Riverside Church, a Christian church in upper Manhattan New York, by John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Among these paintings is Hofmann's *Christ and the Rich Young Ruler*.

Christ and the Rich Young Ruler depicts the story from Mark 10:17-22, which Matthew and Luke also record. While Mark only records that a man approached Jesus, Matthew details that he was young, and Luke that he was a ruler. All three Gospels record that he was rich (see Luke 18:23), having great possessions (see Matthew 19:22; Mark 10:22). Hofmann shows the wealth of the young man in his dress. The luminous aqua green of his tunic, the pure white of his robe with its embroidered trim, his fine woven sash, and his plush jeweled headdress all bespeak a man with great means.

Look up Mark 10:17. From his question and the manner in which he asks, what impression are we given about this young man?

In the gospel accounts, the young man's posture and language indicate the sincerity with which he inquires, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Mark 10:17). In addition, when Jesus responds by listing the commandments, the young man is able to reply "Teacher, all these I have observed from my youth" (Mark 10:20). This appears to be a righteous young man, diligent in his faithfulness to God's Law.

Jesus, who knows the young man's heart, does not contest his assertion of fidelity to the Law. For most of us, justice would appear to require Jesus to respond to the young man's question with a "nothing more is needed" type of response. But Jesus does not answer thus. Instead he calls the young man to something even greater. We are reminded of Jesus's call to Peter to "put out into the deep" (Luke 5:4) or Jesus's words in the Sermon on the Mount "but I say to you" (Matthew 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44). Jesus continually calls us into a deeper, more intimate union with himself.

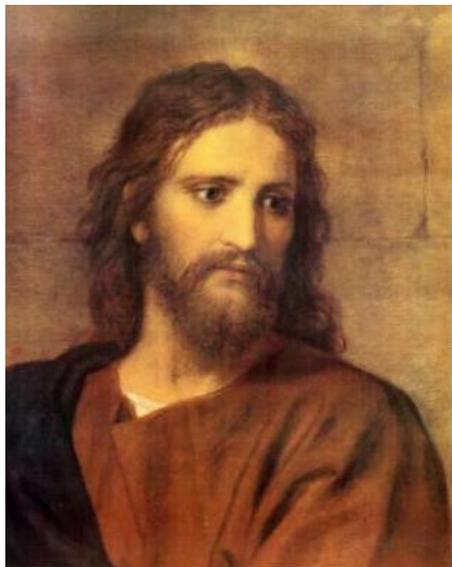
Jesus tells the young man, "Sell what you have, and give to the poor" (Mark 10:21). Hofmann indicates Jesus's words with the gesture of Jesus's hands in the direction of a poorly clad elderly man who is being assisted by a woman with dark, mournful eyes. What is striking in Our Lord's direction is the reason for the young man to sell his possessions: he lacks something. Even with his great possessions and his fidelity to the Law, the young man lacks "treasure in heaven."

The commandments that Jesus lists out to the young man are all those that deal with our interactions with our brothers and sisters. Jesus does not list any of the first three commandments that deal with relationship to God (i.e., having no other gods before him, not taking his name in vain, keeping holy the Sabbath). Something else is taking up this young man's heart-his great possessions. For this reason, Jesus tells him to sell his possessions, give them to the poor, and then "come, follow me." Only then will this young man's heart be empty so that God himself can fill it.

With Jesus's words, the young man is no longer able to look Jesus in the eye; his head is turned slightly, and his eyes look away. He no longer kneels, and in Hofmann's painting the young man stands in a rather

indolent stance. Hofmann's portrayal is such that we almost feel that in his heart the young man has already turned to walk away.

Mark's account of this scene includes a detail that does not appear in the other Gospel accounts. Before Jesus give his direction to the young man, Mark records that "Jesus looking upon him loved him" (Mark 10:21). Jesus reaches out to the young man in love and invites him to something more: to find his treasure in Heaven, to enter into an intimate relationship with his God. Hofmann beautifully includes a faint nimbus around Jesus's head indicating his divinity-it is God himself who extends the invitation to the rich young ruler, and to each of us. Hofmann also conveys a depth of emotion on Jesus's face that allows the viewer a glimpse of Jesus's sacred heart, the font of his great love for the young man, and for each of us. Rosmarie Müller, who translated Hofmann's personal papers, records a letter he wrote regarding the painting.



"What always interested me deeply in my art was the expression in the faces of men and women because that expression reveals the inner life of a person.... The face of the rich young ruler, for example, shows clearly that he is ashamed for he rejected what the Lord had asked of him. But a far greater challenge was the expression in the face of the Savior: His keen eyes, should fathom the innermost recesses of the young man's soul and at the same time they should express deep sympathy, for it is written that 'He loved him.' You have to judge for yourself whether I have accomplished this task or not."

While viewers may differ on whether Hofmann accomplished his task, that he at least came close seems to be confirmed by the fact that a close-up detail of Jesus's face from this painting was of such interest that it is known by its own title, *Jesus at Thirty-Three*.

Take a moment to journal your ideas, questions, or insights about this lesson. Write down thoughts you had that may not have been mentioned in the text or discussion questions. List any personal applications you gained from the lessons. What challenged you the most in the teachings? How might you turn what you've learned into specific action?
