

Ordinary 30 B
Mark 10:46-52
WORLD YOUTH SUNDAY
"Jesus, I Want To See"

There are several stories in the New Testament about Jesus healing the blind. I remember the one with the mud packs that gradually healed the blind man in Bethsaida. And of course, our Patron Saint was blinded by God until he finally came to believe in Jesus as his Savior.

Today's reading from Mark's Gospel has a couple of different themes to explore. The first one is pretty easy to grasp. The blindness of Bartimaeus is an analogy to the sin we all carry in us. Even though we believe we are all good people, there are very few of us that should say "I'm ready Lord. Come and get me! My personal prayer is, "Not today God. Check back tomorrow!"

Of course, we do recognize and believe that the healing actions of Jesus are the representation of the loving forgiveness of our heavenly Father. Christ became man to bring that personal forgiveness through His caring and curing of the sick, the disabled, the diseased, the blind, and even in the raising of the dead.

This is the will of the Father: that all of us seek the Love of Jesus in our daily lives so that we too can be forgiven. That we too can see!

In other stories we hear about individuals that Jesus has cured and they take off to show their good fortune of physical healing without accepting or grasping the true grace they have just received.

But Bartimaeus gives us the example of truly thanking our Savior for His forgiveness. The last verse says, "Immediately he received his sight and followed Him on the way."

By not leaving the crowd and going back home to family and friends, Bartimaeus is reaffirming his faith, his belief, and most of all his love for the Son of God.

There's a story about a skinny young boy who loved football with all his heart. Practice after practice, he eagerly gave everything he had. But being half the size of the other boys, he got absolutely nowhere. At all the games, this hopeful athlete sat on the bench and hardly ever played.

This teenager lived alone with his father, and the two of them had a very special relationship. Even though the son was usually on the bench, his father was always in the stands cheering. He never missed a game.

This young man was still the smallest of the class when he started his senior year of high school. But his father continued to encourage him but also made it very clear that he did not have to play football if he didn't want to. All through high school he never missed a practice nor a game but remained a bench-warmer all four years. His faithful father was always in the stands, always with words of encouragement for him.

When the young man went to college, he decided to try out for the football team as a "walk-on." Everyone was sure he could never make the cut, but he did. The coach admitted that he kept him on the roster because he always puts his heart and soul to every practice, and at the same time, provided the other members with the spirit and hustle they badly needed. The news that he had survived the cut thrilled him so much that he rushed to the nearest phone and called his father. His father shared his excitement.

This persistent young athlete never missed practice during his four years at college and his father never missed a game, even though he never got to play.

It was the end of his senior football season, and as he trotted onto the practice field the week of the big playoff game, the coach met him with a telegram. The young man read the telegram and then mumbled to the coach, "My father died this morning. Is it all right if I miss practice today?" The coach put his arm gently around his shoulder and said, "Take the rest of the week off and don't even plan to come back to the game on Saturday."

Saturday arrived, and the game was not going well. Near the end of the game, when the team was ten points behind, a silent young man quietly slipped into the empty locker room and put on his football gear. As he ran onto the sidelines, the coach and his players were astounded to see their faithful teammate back so soon.

"Coach, please let me play. I've just got to play today," said the young man. The coach pretended not to hear him. But the young man persisted, and finally feeling sorry for him, the coach gave in. "All right," he said. "You can go in." Even though the coach put him in a safe position on defense, the ball was fumbled which he picked up and ran in for a touchdown. The coach, the players and everyone in the stands could not believe their eyes.

It was now the closing seconds of the game and the opposing team had to punt on a fourth down. The coach let him in one last time but told him to let the ball go dead and the offense would take over. Well, this kid caught the ball and ran all the way for the winning touchdown.

The fans broke loose. His teammates hoisted him onto their shoulders. Such cheering you never heard.

As he came off the field the coach said to him "I can't believe it. You were great. What got into you? How did you do it?"

He looked at the coach, with tears in his eyes, and said, "Well, you knew how my dad came to every game and that he died, but did you know that my dad was blind?"

So today was the first time he could see me play, and I wanted to show him I could do it!"

This leads me into the next area of learning from this gospel reading and also is a great connection to this Sunday's theme of our Church. That is of World Youth Day. Hopefully, you have seen and heard about the activities planned for the young men and women of our parish. The St. Paul leaders and ministers to our youth have done an excellent job of organizing a day of fun and reflection for all of our junior high and high school students.

The second thought I'm referring to involves the actual communication that passed between Bartimaeus and Jesus. Remember that Bartimaeus called out several times to get Jesus attention? And what happened? The crowds, all those around him, tried to stifle him, to shut him out from God's love.

It was his persistence that caught Jesus' attention and that opened the way for our Lord to bring Bartimaeus through the crowd. And finally in His presence, He asks Bartimaeus what he wants. The reply being: "Master, I want to see!" Jesus, I want to see!

What a simple yet fulfilling request. Sure, he wanted to see the light of day and all of the creations on God's earth but even more, he longed to see the path to follow that will lead him to eternal salvation. His faith said, "I want to see you Lord now and in your heavenly kingdom.

Our youth of today are calling out "Jesus, I want to see!" They are looking for the truth. They are seeking the God of Justice and Love, not the gods - small "g" - of materialism and selfishness. The sin in today's world is much more deafening than the crowds of Bartimaeus.

"Jesus, I want to see!"

The Jesus they are pleading to is us. We are the Body of Christ on earth and they are looking to us for direction and leadership. They want you and me, as the hands and feet, ears and eyes, life and breath of God's presence, to answer them through the exercising of our own faith.

"Jesus, I want to see!"

In his first Encyclical Letter titled "God Is Love" Pope Benedict XVI wrote: "Those who carry out the Church's charitable (which I take to include teaching and ministering) {repeat} activities on the practical level, must not be inspired by ideologies aimed at improving the world, but should rather be guided by the faith which works through love."

"Jesus, I want to see!"

The young of today are looking for new images of what this world should and could be. Just like Bartimaeus, they want to see more than the physical things around them. And, as Pope Benedict advises, it is up to us to guide them in the path of justice, respect and love; not mold them in the ways of a selfish, immoral, unjust, and unloving society.

At the retreat center I run, our weekends are filled with Jr. High, High School and college students searching for their spiritual gifts.

They search for fun and games and a whole lot of food too, but by the end of their stay, you can see the change that has taken them over.

"Jesus, I want to see!"

They have not been told how to look for Jesus. They are not told how to express their faith life. They are not all expected to be on the same level of love and trust.

Some leave as John, the loving disciple; some as Paul, taking their faith kicking and screaming; some as Peter, with doubts or unanswered questions. Of course, some leave as Mary Magdalene, full of total and complete love; and some as Elizabeth Seton or Mother Theresa, with the mind and spirit to dedicate themselves to the care of the poor and destitute.

"Jesus, I want to see!"

Beginning with this year's World Youth Day, let's all focus on the youth of our family, our parish, and even of our world.

Let's instill in them the importance of a great and active faith life that will lead to eternal salvation, not by forcing our points of view on them, but by guiding them through our actions of faith and love.

"Jesus, I want to see!"