

FIRST IMPRESSIONS 30th SUNDAY (B)

Jeremiah 31: 7-9 Psalm 126 Hebrews 5: 1-6 Mark 10: 46-52

By: *Jude Siciliano*, OP

Dear Preachers:

Well, there certainly is a lot of excitement in Florida these days! As I write this the state lottery is worth over \$100 million. People from nearby states are driving to Florida to buy lottery tickets. It is the hope of many that winning that much money will fulfill a lifetime of dreams and solve all problems. But there is that old adage, “Be careful what you wish for.” About a year ago I read a story in the newspaper about past lottery winners.

Apparently there are a good number of winners who, instead of enjoying a life of unbounded happiness with all their wishes fulfilled, have experienced quite the contrary. The stories of some were very tragic: there were divorces; conflicts arose with other family members; friends were lost; some winners committed suicide, others received threats of violence—a few even faced bankruptcy! People just couldn’t handle their new-found fortune; everything changed for them. More than one “lucky winner” lamented, “I wish I had never won anything! I wish I had my old life back again!”

Bartimaeus is called “the blind beggar,” but that is not his whole identity. In fact, it is a partial condition for him – he already sees a lot. He sees his needs, he knows he is blind, and he knows where help lies. He isn’t discouraged by the surrounding voices of the crowd who want to hush him up. In fact, the opposition seems to make them bolder. In his case, the Persian proverb is true, “A blind person who sees is better than a seeing person who is blind.” (Thanks to Patricia Datchuck Sanchez, in “Celebration: An Ecumenical Worship Resource” for that quote.) Bartimaeus may lack physical sight, but he has spiritual insight since he calls Jesus by the messianic title, “Son of David.”

Bartimaeus asked for sight; for some of us that would be considered a very brave request. Some people don’t want to see what lies right before their eyes: marriage problems, addictions to work to the detriment of their families, their children secretly addicted to drugs, friends with questionable values, etc. It takes courage to ask for sight because it will require changes— perhaps profound changes that some may be unprepared or unwilling to make.

I went to our neighborhood drugstore the other day and the Christmas decorations shouted at me! The season starts earlier and earlier, and the dazzling lights and advertisements are blinding. It's not just children who get seduced by the advertising; all of us somehow are drawn into it and discover needs we never thought we had. "Needs" – we really don't need it all!

Bartimaeus knows his needs and when Jesus asks, "What do you want me to do for you?" he responds succinctly, "Master, I want to see." Bartimaeus' request of Jesus could be our prayer as the Christmas season heightens and the distractions become more intense: "Master, I want to see!" It's a prayer we can say at other moments of our lives as well, when we are: struggling through a family crisis; trying to make a decision about how to care for a very ill friend or parent; facing a moment of tension in our marriage; involved in a heated discussion with our friends; searching for a way to simplify our lives so that we can respond more to the needs of others, etc.

Bartimaeus' words can become our prayer at a crossroad moment in our lives – when we are trying to make an important decision about a job, course of studies, even a future spouse. At those times we join Bartimaeus in his prayer, "Master, I want to see!" The daily decisions we make at home, school, work or in the parish, can seem mundane and, if truth be told, insignificant. Still those decisions add up and, over a period of time, set a pattern in our lives – "Master, I want to see!"

We have enough experience by now to acknowledge that in our past some of our decisions were blind. We look back and consider their consequences; we wish we had acted more wisely; had seen more clearly. If only we could go back in time and redo what we have done; take a different path; make better choices. Well, there is no guarantee that we won't make foolish decisions again, we probably will. But it makes sense to include God in the big and even smaller decisions which affect our lives and the lives of those around us. The Bartimaeus prayer, "Master, I want to see!" is a daily admission that we don't see clearly on our own and so we need God's light in our lives!

Jesus placed a potent question to Bartimaeus, "What do you want me to do for you?" It is a question he asks us now – hear it? It's an invitation to believe and trust the promise: that if we ask for vision and insight to guide our lives, we will get it. Maybe quickly—but usually, over the course of our lives – day by day, one

step at a time, little by little.

Jesus meets Bartimaeus on the road into Jerusalem. Which is where we meet him – as we travel through our lives, sometimes finding ourselves in our own personal Jerusalem, a place of suffering and endings. There, confused and disoriented by the sudden changes we face and collapse of our plans, we cry out again our prayer, “Master, I want to see!” We want to see Jesus in this new place; we want to know that we are not abandoned to face fearful endings alone. The ending of today’s story gives us hope. After Bartimaeus received his sight, he followed Jesus “on the way,” the road that led into Jerusalem. “The way,” was the earliest term used to describe Jesus’ disciples. “The way” was shorthand for Jesus’ way. Mark is suggesting that the blind man has become a disciple through the sight Jesus gave him. We disciples believe that no matter what we face in our life’s journey, Jesus has gone before us, knows our pain and journeys with us each step of “the way.” As we travel we pray over and over, “Master, I want to see!”

But be prepared! Remember that old saying, “Be careful what you ask for?” Well we can say, “Be careful what you pray for.” If we ask for sight, it will be granted. But we will need courage and determination to do what our, “God-given-vision” reveals and what changes our new sight requires of us. That is something to ask for at this Eucharist – sight – and then ask for the courage and determination to follow through on what we now see needs to be done in our lives.

Bartimaeus is our patron saint today if we are: sitting by the side of the road; leaning forward; not afraid to acknowledge our needs for sight in this complex world. We who have faith have the sight that Bartimaeus received, like him we follow Jesus on “the Way.” A way of welcoming outsiders; forgiving those who have offended us; accepting one another as equals; being a community in which we see each other as brothers and sisters, as disciples together on “the way.”

FAITH BOOK

Mini-reflections on the Sunday scripture readings designed for persons on the run. “Faith Book” is also brief enough to be posted in the Sunday parish bulletins people take home.

From today’s gospel reading:

Jesus said to the blind man in reply, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man replied to him, “Master, I want to see.”

Reflection:

Jesus placed a potent question to Bartimaeus, “What do you want me to do for you?” It is a question he asks us now – hear it? It’s an invitation to believe, and trust the promise: that if we ask for vision and insight to guide our lives, we will get it. Maybe quickly—most usually, over the course of our lives – day by day, one step at a time, little by little.

So, we ask ourselves:

- What is there in my life that I have been avoiding or unwilling to look at?
- Where or to whom can I go for insight, so that I can make the changes I need to for a healthier and more spiritual life?

JUSTICE BULLETIN BOARD

“Master, I want to see.” (Mark: 10:51-52)

Like the man in today’s Gospel, we too can be “blind” to the needs of others. Catholic Charities offers us their clear vision and invites us to respond together to the poor who so often remain invisible in our midst.

“Catholic Charities is a diocesan wide organization whose mission is to help parishes and communities live out the social mission of the Church as servant to and advocate for those in need. In its roles of servant, advocate, facilitator and convener, Catholic Charities acts in the parish and community-at-large to heighten awareness of issues and, when appropriate, provides services to fulfill unmet needs. Catholic Charities serves people in need through advocating for social and economic justice as well as addressing immediate needs with emergency resources or direct services.”

“Our ministry is to be the two feet of Christ, carrying charity and justice into the world, often one family at a time. With one in five children living below the poverty level in our state, the needs far out-pace social reforms and available services to enable all to live with dignity. Catholic Charities serves without regard to religious affiliation.” www.dioceseofraleigh.org/how/social/programs/

Emergency Assistance: providing food, clothing for young children and limited financial aid.

Family Support Services: family centered assessment, advocacy; information & referral; parenting, ESL and other classes

Peace and Justice: a resource office for education and collaboration with parishes and communities to address local and global needs.

Counseling: licensed counselors offer skilled interventions, support and healing for many life issues

Parish Social Ministry: education and partnership to address needs of both English and Spanish-speaking communities

Adoptions: education, pre-placement assessments and post-placement supervision for families seeking international and some domestic adoptions

Immigration: accredited workers assist in submission of documents with emphasis on reuniting and keeping families together

Disaster Response: partnerships with parishes and inter-faith community to provide long-term recovery for survivors of natural disasters

(Submitted by Anne and Bill Werdel, from the parish bulletin of Sacred Heart Cathedral, Raleigh, N. C.)

POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES

Inmates on death row are the most forgotten people in the prison system. Each week I post in this space several inmates' names and addresses. I invite you to write a postcard to one or more of them to let them know we have not forgotten them. If you like, tell them you heard about them through North Carolina's, "People of Faith Against the Death Penalty." If the inmate responds you might consider becoming pen pals.

Please write to:

- Paul P. Brown #0051026 (On death row since 8/11/00)
- Timothy L. White #0043845 (8/31/00)
- Michael D. Holmes #0189289 (9/8/00)
-

Central Prison 1300 Western Blvd. Raleigh, N.C. 27606

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Our webpage addresses: <https://www.PreacherExchange.com>

"First Impressions" is a service to preachers and those wishing to prepare for Sunday worship. It is sponsored by the Southern Dominican Province, U.S.A. If you would like "First Impressions" sent weekly to a friend, [Click Here](#).

If you would like to support this ministry, [Click Here](#) to make a secure tax-deductible online donation.

Thank you.

“Blessings on your preaching”,

Jude Siciliano, OP

FrJude@JudeOP.org