

## 30<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time – B

When you go to the eye doctor, there's always that vision test that involves flipping back and forth between two letters, and the doctor wants to know which one is clearer. This is always stressful for me because oftentimes the two images look so similar I have a hard time discerning which one is clearer. Of course, I don't want to choose the wrong one, because it's my vision that's on the line, but I also know deep down that there has to be a limit to how many times I can ask my doctor to flip back and forth between the two images while I agonize over them. And of course he's probably thinking, while smiling through gritted teeth, "Don't overthink this! I've got 20 more people I've got to do this with today!"

Our vision of course is very important to us. I can't imagine what life would be like without the gift of sight. And of course in the time of Christ, something like blindness could really cut you off

from society: I am sure there were no accommodations for the blind; they were utterly dependent on the good will of others and were usually condemned to a life of poverty and begging in the streets. So when Jesus came to Jericho, as we heard in our Gospel reading today, the blind man Bartimaeus, who was begging by the side of the road, cried out to him, "Jesus, son of David, have pity on me." And, although the people around were trying to shush him, he refused to be silent and kept crying out to Jesus to have pity on him.

And Jesus of course does have pity on him. He ignores the people who are trying to shush poor Bartimaeus and instead tells them to call him, and he eagerly approaches Jesus. And when Jesus asks him, "What do you want me to do for you," he replies, "Master, I want to see." Jesus gives him his sight, just by willing it. And our Gospel concludes by saying that Bartimaeus "followed him on the way."

This Gospel reading teaches us many things, perhaps the most obvious being that Jesus has the power to perform miracles, to heal the sick, restore sight to the blind, and so on. If it is God's will, he can do anything. It also teaches us that we ought to bring our needs and petitions to the Lord, as we of course do at every Mass. And certainly prayers of petition I think are a very common form of prayer, perhaps the most common. St. Augustine says that we ought to bring our petitions to the Lord, not because doing this somehow informs God about what we need – of course, He already knows what we need. And He knows better what we need than we do. When we bring our petitions to the Lord, we are not somehow getting Him to change His mind. Rather, our prayers of petition change us – when we bring our needs to the Lord, we are exercising our faith and our trust in Him, our confidence that He hears us, that He loves us, and that He has the power to answer our prayers.

Yet sometimes it may seem that God does not hear us – our prayers seem to go unanswered. We ought not to get discouraged and give up, however, but rather persevere in our prayers. Doing so will continue to exercise our faith and our hope in the Lord. God of course knows what He is doing, and He knows that perseverance in prayer gives us the opportunity to grow in these virtues. We might not receive exactly what we want, when we want it, but if we persevere, as did Bartimaeus, we *will* grow spiritually and we *will* grow closer to God. He knows what we truly need, and although He might not give us what we want, He *will* give us what we need.

Jesus gave Bartimaeus the gift of physical sight. Certainly, He has the power to do that. But the physical miracles that Jesus performs in the Gospels also serve as metaphors for spiritual things. So while Jesus gave the gift of physical sight to Bartimaeus, as wonderful as it was for him, this gift only lasted for the duration of the rest of his life here on earth. God can give us physical healing,

but what He desires to give us even more is spiritual healing. God can open the eyes of those who are physically blind, but even more does He desire to open the eyes of those who are spiritually blind.

God wants to restore our spiritual sight so that we can see things as they truly are – not as we might want to see them, but as God sees them – or, in other words, as they truly are. We human beings tend to see reality and the world around us through our own lens – we filter things through our own personal lens. That lens is no doubt composed of numerous things or influences – perhaps our own personal experiences, the society in which we live, the education that we received, and, yes, the media that we consume. We might see reality through the lens of a particular ideology. All these things and more influence how we see the world, for good or for ill. The thing is, I think very often we are not aware that we might be looking through a lens at all – we often assume that how we perceive things *is* how they really are. And the most distorting

lens that exists is caused by sin: the more we are given over to sin, or the more that sinful habits and behaviors control us, the more distorted will be our vision of the world around us, and the less will we see reality as it really is.

What Jesus desires to give us, then, is a new spiritual sight. He wants us to see everything – ourselves, others, the world around us, God Himself – as it really is. Of course, that requires a certain humility on our part, because, again, we have a tendency to think that how we perceive things is the way they really are. If we hold a certain opinion, and someone else has a different opinion, well, they're probably wrong and we're right, no?

So, how do we see things more and more as God sees them, as they really are? Let us be a little like Bartimaeus: first, let us humble ourselves and recognize our own poverty before the Lord. And let us petition the Lord to help us to see, to give us the gift of spiritual sight, so that we might see as He sees. God has also given also some

other gifts which are readily available to help expand our spiritual vision: namely, Scripture, the constant teachings of the Church, the sacraments. Each of these, if we approach them with a disposition of humility, prayerfully asking God to give us the proper disposition to use them well, can help us to see more and more as God sees.

And, like Bartimaeus, let us persevere in asking for this gift of spiritual sight; no doubt, we will be asking all our lives. But if we do, God will continue to expand our vision more and more. It will only be in heaven that we will truly be able to see all things as He sees them, when we finally see God face to face.

- **October 27, 2024 at St. Mary's, Spring Lake**