



Things to Ponder

Lord, I Want to See

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In the Scriptures, "blind" is a code word for unbelief; "see" a code word for faith. A person without faith, just as a person physically blind, can easily become disoriented and lost, trip and fall, and wander aimlessly. A person who believes, like a person who can see, has a sense of direction, can see clearly the obstacles that would make him trip and fall, and is not disoriented by the suffering and pain that is so much a part of life, because it is a part of Jesus.

In the Gospels for the past few Sundays, we have met some people who, while not blind in their eyes, are blind in their hearts. They cannot put their faith in Jesus and act on His words. In the Gospel of two weeks ago, a rich young man approaches Jesus and asks Him what he should do to inherit eternal life. Jesus tells him to sell his possessions and then he would be truly free to follow Him. He couldn't put his faith in Jesus, which would assure him of the very thing he wanted, eternal life.

Last Sunday's Gospel related how Jesus told His apostles, specifically the brothers James and John, that faith in Him would entail humility, service to others, and even suffering. But all this flies right over their heads because all they are interested in is sitting in places of honor when Jesus comes in glory. They do not perceive who Jesus really is. They are blind.

In today's Gospel (Mark 10:46-52) Jesus crosses paths with someone who really does believe. Ironically it is a man born blind, Bartimaeus. But he sees Jesus for who He really is. He calls out to Jesus, "Son of David, have pity on me!" This is the first time in Mark's Gospel that we hear the name "Son of David." It was a title reserved for the long-awaited Messiah, who would be a descendent of King David. He cannot see with his eyes, but he sees with his heart. Jesus asks Bartimaeus the very same question He asked of James and John in last week's Gospel: "What do you want me to do for you?" James and John wanted power, and they didn't get it. Bartimaeus wants to see. He sees Jesus with the eyes of faith, manifested now by his ability to see with his eyes. His faith set him free to follow Jesus, the very thing that the rich young man could not bring himself to do.

Although Bartimaeus' cure appears to be instantaneous, the Gospel hints at a process we must grow through in order to have faith, as well as to deepen the faith we have. Note that what first attracts Bartimaeus to Jesus is not Jesus Himself, but the noise of the crowd. Something great and important was attracting the crowd and Bartimaeus was curious to find out what was happening. Then he learns from the crowd that he was in the presence of "Jesus of Nazareth," a title that tells us only where He was from. Certainly the people standing near him were recounting the miracles that Jesus was performing. And so Bartimaeus calls out to Jesus as "Son of David," a title that indicates not merely where Jesus is from, but who He really is. All this he picked up from the crowd, not directly from Jesus. Finally he encounters Jesus personally, one-on-one, face-to-face. And Jesus becomes not just "the" Messiah, but "his" Messiah.

We go through a similar faith process. How did we first learn about Jesus? From a crowd of other people: parents, teachers, priests, and other people who believe. Then we learn things about Jesus: what He did and taught, as did Bartimaeus, from those around him. Then we learned who Jesus is: the Lord, the Savior, the Son of God. But real faith comes in a personal encounter with Jesus, not unlike that of Bartimaeus: in all the sacraments, especially Holy Communion, where we give Jesus the opportunity to free us from the blindness of sin, and to cure us of whatever impedes our growth in faith. This process repeats itself over and over again in the course of our lives, for faith is our living communion with Jesus, and anything living needs to grow and develop.

Jesus calls us all to faith and discipleship, not "en-masse" but each one of us individually. Because He loves us so much, He is constantly asking us, "What do you want me to do for you?" May our response mirror that of Bartimaeus: "Lord, I want to see."

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