

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson

Sunday 24th October 2021 - 30th Sunday ordinary time

Also the 178th anniv Dedication of the church in Penzance
Readings (Year B): 1st: Jeremiah 31:7-9 Psalm: 125. 2nd: Hebrews
5:1-6. Gospel: Mark 10:46-52.

The zigzag path down to the Grotto in Lourdes was one of Cardinal Hume's favourite places there. What you see on the first corner is a statue of Bartimaeus, the blind man. Looking over the Grotto he sees nothing because he is blind. Why is it there? The statue was placed there by an Italian who though not cured of her blindness, rediscovered her faith, which she realised was more to be prized than physical sight. The point about the gospel story is not only that the blind man got his physical sight, which indeed he did: more important is that he followed Jesus.

In Mark's estimation the restoration of sight to the blind beggar Bartimaeus was a very significant miracle. His deliberate placing of this story and the detailed narrative, set up Bartimaeus as a model of all who believe in Jesus Christ and follow his way. Mark's setting places it at the very end of the 2nd major section of his Gospel, just before he enters Jerusalem where the 3rd act of the drama will be placed. The 1st part raises the question: who is Jesus? That is answered in part by Peter; 'You are the Christ'. Immediately before that climax Jesus had healed a blind man at Bethsaida.

For the last 7 Sundays we have drawn gospel readings from the journey of Jesus towards Jerusalem. He constantly taught them that the way to follow him would be in renunciation of self and service of others. Mark does not relate any miracle in this section until this of today. So the entire way of discipleship is sandwiched between the two miracles of giving sight to the blind. This final miracle sets up Bartimaeus. as a model disciple, for he believes, he sees and he follows Jesus on the way.

He **hears** that it was Jesus who was passing by. Since **faith comes by hearing**, this is a loaded term. He already has some faith as he uses the messianic title Son of David, Jesus have pity on me.

The Greek word used is eleison: mercy, pity. Hence Kyrie eleison. Normally as we know Jesus calls for secrecy at the faintest whiff of a messianic title. Ironically it was the crowd who tried to silence the title and the man. For Jesus there is now no need for secrecy, as he is on the threshold of Jerusalem where the nature of his mission would be finally understood.

He asked Bartimaeus “what favour do you want of me?” The two disciples, we heard last week, James & John had looked for a very selfish favour. Here Jesus offers the favour. Bartimaeus was a pitiful humble request for sight. Go, your faith has saved you. Bartimaeus already had faith, and it saved him, a word suggesting more than physical healing.

We can learn much from B. The witness of a poor blind beggar speaks across the ages. Consider his plight: blind and destitute, to survive he had to beg. Humbled by his affliction his cry came from the depth of his being, ‘Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me.’ Impervious to rebuke, he pushed his way forward; tenacious and determined, he was undaunted by opposition. He is a model of discipleship. He reveals the attitude of a true disciple.

Our founding forefathers must have had a similar attitude and determination. They were people of vision, a vision of Jesus and the kingdom he comes to bring. We need that to continue to hold that vision in the 21st Cent. I’m reminded of the words ‘the faithful few fought bravely’. We may feel hopeless and helpless when dark days come, yet it is then we turn to the Lord when, things are difficult. We have no idea what the future holds. In many ways it is a very different world than that of 1843; 1908. even 1958.

Yet today we need the same faith and learn from Bartimaeus that grace, mercy and help come only from God. Two energies come together: the energy of Jesus and the energy of the believer. The two vital energies meet and **wow** who knows what can happen? As we celebrate our houses of prayer pray that the vision of our founders will flourish and prosper now as then.

Canon Philip Dyson

Holy Family Parish www.penzancecatholicchurch.org