

Ordinary 30, Cycle B, 10.27.24  
Jeremiah 31:7-9/Hebrews 5:1-6/Mark 10:46-52

### KEEPING OUR EYES WIDE OPEN

When was the last time you shocked yourself – by something you said or did or thought about doing? It happened to me a while ago in line at a grocery store. I had some friends coming for dinner and I decided to spare no expense, since they had been very generous and kind to me. As the cashier was sliding each product over the price scanner – focaccia bread with rosemary, persimmons and figs for the salad with baby lettuce and arugula, red and yellow bell pepper and onions; Genoa salami and Danish blue cheese for the hors d'oeuvres – the cashier on the next aisle called my cashier's name and distracted her for a moment.



I wasn't sure... I don't think the cashier noticed... but it looked like the swordfish steaks might not have registered when she swiped them across the scanner, and the bill seemed a lot less than it should have been -- the fish was expensive. And for a moment there... I had an internal debate... the beginnings of a moral meltdown. [*"Well, this store charges too much for their food anyway"...* *"It wasn't my mistake"...* *"Aah, who's gonna know?"*]

Well, I'm embarrassed to tell you this. The letter to the Hebrews proves sadly accurate: *"He (Jesus) is able to deal patiently with the*

*ignorant and erring, for he himself is beset by weakness and so, for this reason, must make sin offerings for himself as well as for the people."* I'm obviously one of those weak people. (And just so you don't think too poorly of me... I did alert that cashier to her mistake, and paid for the fish after she re-scanned it. She was grateful... and I was relieved of a guilty conscience.)

The miracle in today's gospel is not so much what Jesus did for blind man, but what He can do for you and me, because there are so many kinds of blindness that need healing.



There is, of course, **physical blindness**, the absence of vision. The beggar whom Jesus encounters is Bartimaeus. Because he is blind, he's cruelly relegated to the lowest cultural caste of the day —the only thing that could bring him lower would be if he was also a leper. This is why the fact that the beggar is given a name at all is fascinating. The gospel writer Mark wants us to know this man and to somehow empathize with his suffering and his dreams, so that when his salvation arrives, and sight is regained, we might actually rejoice with him. So, we can understand the thrill of Bartimaeus' cure. A whole new world opened up for him.

There is another kind of blindness, even more dangerous than physical blindness, and that's **moral blindness**. Our moral sight or vision is called **conscience**. We are all born with it. It develops and matures as we grow, is fine-tuned by experience, and is

enlightened by the Gospel. It helps us to see right and wrong. The tragedy of moral blindness surrounds us daily -- people who harm others and couldn't care less; the pathological liar who tells lies over and over and isn't bothered a bit; the person who can slander another without giving it a second thought; the one who can be unfaithful to a spouse and not lose any sleep over it. Where there is moral blindness there is no loyalty, no truth, no guilt, no shame and no regret, because we've blinded our conscience.



The gift of conscience, a kind of moral eyesight, is a magnificent gift that helps us know right from wrong. Following it, however, is another step. It's a gift to know when we have failed, betrayed another, when we have rebelled, when our life is on the wrong track. It's healthy to feel shame, regret, and guilt, because those are the warning signs of a working conscience -- our moral radar that helps us get back on track. Our dignity as human beings is being able to see, not just the changing colors of the maple trees and the harvest moon or our autumn sunset, but to see right and wrong. Conscience is that very personal space where our Creator calls us from within to follow the light. Physical blindness endangers the body, but moral blindness endangers the soul. The gift of moral sight or conscience is what makes us human beings different from the rest of creation.

There is a third kind of blindness beside the physical and the moral kind, and that's the **blindness of unbelief**. Faith gives us vision to see beyond the senses, beyond the world around us to its deeper truth -- that the world has come from God and is the place of our journey back to God. Faith enables us to see that we are more than cell and bone, more than our DNA, more than the chemicals and events that happen inside us. We are more than our emotions and feelings; more than our IQ. We have a soul, a purpose and a destiny. Through the lens of faith, we can see that, however others may see us, God sees in us a person with an immortal soul who is destined to live with God forever. Faith enables us to see more in ourselves than others may see.

As we approach the November 5<sup>th</sup> election ballot, there is another blindness that needs to be healed. I would name it "**political blindness**." For months now, we have been subjected to the endless cycle of campaign propaganda. Scandalous amounts of money, which would be better spent on alleviating the hunger of children in poverty-stricken places in America or providing health care for those who cannot afford it, have gone into each ad, each poster and each text message. The gospel says: "*When the crowd tells Bartimaeus to be quiet, he only cries out louder.*" Bartimaeus teaches us the importance of unwavering faith. Right now, I think that all of us are filled with anxiety and angst over what will happen in 10 days -- no matter your political affiliation. Our nation is completely divided, as is our Church. No matter which candidate wins the presidency, the results of the next election will fill half the country with elation and a sense of victory and vindication, and the other half with hopelessness, despair, and dread,



especially in light of the violent insurrection at the U.S Capital Building on January 6<sup>th</sup> four years ago. How does our **“unwavering faith”** help people on both sides? It’s not ‘political’ or ‘taking sides’ to acknowledge the reality we are facing, and to encourage all of us to hold on to our belief that God will be with us through it all, that there are critical lessons to be learned, that faith is our mainstay through all circumstances of life.

The scriptures and our faith tradition, including the teaching of our Holy Father, provide us core beliefs which can guide our conscience in the choices we make as voters. Those values affirm that food and health care are not privileges reserved for the wealthy, but universal rights. Care for creation and the earth, our common home, is a requirement of our faith. Every person has both a right and a responsibility to participate in our shared political process, which we must structure to serve the common good. Our Catholic faith promotes the dignity of work, the rights of workers and an inclusive economy that places people over profit, and ensures that all people have what they need to thrive. The scriptures and divine law insist upon every person’s intrinsic worth, dignity and right to live in safety. No human being is vermin. Every human being is a child of God – no exceptions. All people have a right to seek a

safe and good life for themselves and their families.



As we hear the story of blind Bartimaeus, let us thank God for the gift of sight and resolve to respect and not endanger those gifts that expand our field of vision and open our hearts to the divine. A French proverb says: *When the blind man carries the banner, we to those who follow.* You and I have a choice this day to follow the One whose clear vision of the Kingdom of God can guide all our thoughts and actions. We follow not the beating of drums of war, not the false campaign slogans of political parties vying for first place, nor the clamor of the marketplace urging us to fill our lives with more ‘stuff.’ We follow the voice of Jesus, the Master, who alone can cure the blindness we suffer in all its forms. What the crowd said to Bartimaeus, they also say to us as we strive to carry out our role as faithful and faith-filled citizens: *Take courage, get up! Jesus is calling you!*

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