

October 26, 2003  
30th Sunday in Ordinary Time

By Father Charles Bowes

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

## *When we have no strength of our own on which to rely, we become the Lord's disciples.*

This story of the healing of blind Bartimaeus is the last miracle story in Saint Mark's gospel. Immediately following the incident with Bartimaeus, the blind man, Jesus, and his disciples move on to Jerusalem. Up until this time, the disciples - the so-called disciples of Jesus - have been vying among themselves for positions of power and influence, completely misunderstanding what Jesus is about. Hence, the story of Bartimaeus is one of faith - the outsider is the only one who truly sees.

The voice of the blind beggar comes from the roadside as Jesus' company passes by. The followers try to silence the cry. "Don't bother us. You aren't part of our company. We are the faithful followers of the Lord." The disciples who were hand-picked by Jesus and should have known who he really is do not seem to know him at all. Their basic response to Jesus is misunderstanding, amazement, fear, a means for self-advancement. Those who seemingly have no reason to know who Jesus really is not only know him, but manifest a profound faith in who he is. The point is that real recognition of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, requires faith...and not just physical proximity or going through the motions of faith.

Bartimaeus is an outsider in that he is a beggar and he is blind. Nevertheless, he knows who Jesus is and will not be silenced in his attempt to get Jesus' attention. Interestingly enough, even though Bartimaeus is a beggar, he does not ask Jesus for money. He asks for pity, for compassion. His persistence pays off. Over the crowd of followers trying to silence the beggar, Jesus hears him and beckons the stranger.

What the beggar wants from Jesus is "to see." What is at stake here is obviously much more than physical sight. This request is also about faith. Remember that the disciples wanted power, honor and glory.

Jesus says nothing in response, except to tell Bartimaeus that his faith has saved him. Nothing more is needed because Bartimaeus already can see. Through faith, he knows who Jesus really is. The ones who remain blind are the disciples. Bartimaeus also gets his physical sight back and he follows Jesus on the way - which is to say he becomes a disciple. It is as if the physical restoration of sight is clearly secondary to the overwhelming insight faith brings. In fact, we might say that faith makes any handicap or challenge bearable. In fact, it might even bring about a healing - but the greatest healing is inside one's own soul.

Perhaps it would be best for us to pay keen attention to our own blindnesses, to sit and dwell with

them...for it is there that we will meet the Lord who calls us to faith in the midst of that hardship. Faith is the key to discipleship. In the mission and ministry of Jesus, a follower without faith is a failure. A follower with faith is a disciple, regardless of his physical gifts or lack thereof.

When we have no strength of our own on which to rely, we become the Lord's disciples.