

Homily for Sunday, October 25, 2009 (30<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time)

*Jeremiah 31:7-9; Psalm 126: 1-6; Hebrews 5:1-6; Mark 10:46-52*

Last Sunday I joined thousands of other runners in the Detroit Free Press/Flagstar Marathon and Half Marathon. I only had enough time to train for the shorter (13.1 mile) race; but like the full marathon it featured the rare opportunity to run in two different countries, taking the runners across the Ambassador Bridge from Detroit to Windsor, Ontario and then back to U.S. soil via a tunnel under the Detroit River. The Lord blessed us with a beautiful day, and thousands of enthusiastic neighbors and volunteers to encourage us along the way.

I started toward the back and then spent a good part of the first five miles weaving around and passing those in front of me. As we were making our way along the beautiful riverfront in Windsor, I noticed a man ahead of me with a sign on his back: “Blind Runner.” It was only then that I noticed the small tether that attached him to the man next to him who was guiding his pace and direction.

As I passed this athlete and his partner, I couldn’t help admiring him for his courage and commitment to his ability rather than his disability. At the same time, I thought about what it would be like to try to run blind. Over the years, I’ve occasionally tried to run short distances with my eyes closed just to see what it was like. It didn’t take more than a few steps and a stumble to convince me to open my eyes and to thank the Lord for the gift of sight, even if it is trifocal-assisted!

Bartimaeus, the blind man in today’s gospel, didn’t have the laws, organizations, technologies, or the encouragement that help many sight-impaired people today. In the ancient world people with blindness and other disabilities were relegated to the margins of society, dependent on their families or charity for support. Many, like Bartimaeus, were reduced to begging on the street.

That’s where he encountered Jesus, who was leaving Jericho on what would be his final journey to Jerusalem. Scripture scholars point out that in Mark’s gospel this journey began with Jesus meeting and healing a blind man (8:22-26) and was near its end when he healed Bartimaeus. In between, he tried to enlighten his own followers on the nature and demands of discipleship, his destiny as the Messiah, and the true meaning of greatness. But they who beheld their Savior every day often failed to recognize him or make out the meaning of his mission.

By contrast, Bartimaeus was physically blind but was willing to see with the eyes of faith. Sensing Jesus’ presence and trusting in his power, he cried out,

“Jesus, son of David, have pity on me;” and he persisted even when those around him tried to shut him up. When Jesus called him, he came at once. When asked what he wanted, Bartimaeus said very plainly, “I want to see.” With that, Jesus healed him by telling him, “God your way; your faith has saved you.” It is interesting to note that *sozo*, the Aramaic verb Jesus uses here, means both “saved” and “healed.”

This gospel story provides an enlightening model for how we can be saved and healed from the various forms of blindness that afflict us. The vast majority of us are not physically blind; but if we spend a little time looking at the moral mirrors of our consciences, most of us will discover other forms of blindness.

Some of us suffer from mental blindness—perhaps we shut our minds to new ideas because they challenge preconceived notions or prejudices. Others suffer from emotional blindness—past hurts in relationships that cast us into the safety but also the darkness of not allowing ourselves to accept the vulnerability that risks future pain but also the possibility of experiencing the wonders of love. Still others of us suffer from spiritual blindness. It may be the glaucoma of not allowing God to work beyond the tunneled vision of our own expectations and desires; or perhaps it is fogged up by those distractions that we do not allow to drift away because we don’t spend sufficient time in meditation and talk too much and listen too little to the Lord.

Recognizing our blindness is the first step to having our sight restored by the Lord. The next step is to ask in faith to be healed, to cry out like Bartimaeus, “Have mercy on me!” This is often the hardest step. We may find a strange comfort or security in our blindness; our faith may be weak; pride may get in the way; or we may fear the consequences and demands that may come upon us with our new sight.

These are the times when we can draw strength from the reminders in our first and second readings: our God is the savior of “the blind and the lame” and the sorrowing; and that same God has given us a high priest—Jesus—who sacrificed himself for us not only in his Passion and death but first in the mystery of his incarnation. Like those around Bartimaeus, these scriptures tell us, “Take courage; get up, Jesus is calling *you*.”

May we be able to lay aside the cloaks of our fears, jump up and tell the Lord that we want to see; and having been healed and saved, may we like Bartimaeus, be prepared to follow him. +