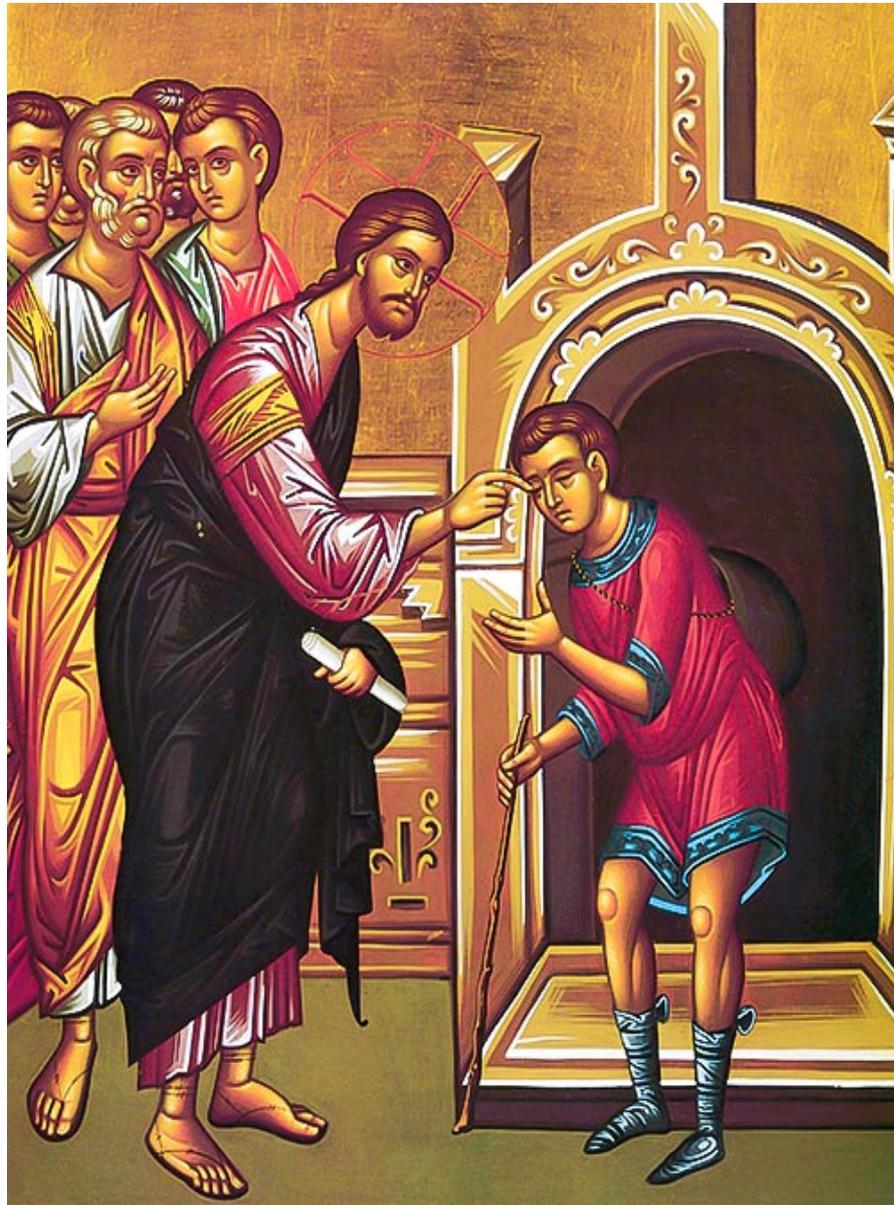


the Sunday Readings



*Jesus said, "What do you want me to do for you?"
The blind man said to him, "My teacher, let me see
again." (Mark 10 : 51)*

30th Sunday Ordinary Time

30th Sunday Ordinary Time

*living towards full vision*¹

introduction

Jesus continues to instruct through his words and through the action of healing a blind beggar named Bartimaeus. In the context of Mark's gospel the story of Bartimaeus' healing is more than a story of the cure of the man's blindness by Jesus. It's about the process of discerning the way disciples of Jesus are to go. Bartimaeus' physical cure is only part of a more complete transformation. This is confirmed by the concluding verse, for when Bartimaeus regained his sight, he followed Jesus – *'on The Way'*.

first reading: Jeremiah 31 : 7 – 9²

[the joyful return of exiles]

*For thus says the LORD: Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob,
and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say,
"Save, O LORD, your people, the remnant of Israel."(7)
See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north,
and gather them from the farthest parts of the Earth,
among them the blind and the lame,
those with child and those in labour, together;
a great company, they shall return here.(8)
With weeping they shall come, and with consolations I will lead them back,
I will let them walk by brooks of water,
in a straight path in which they shall not stumble;
for I have become a father to Israel and Ephraim is my firstborn.(9)*

Jeremiah had been called to, *'uproot and knock down, to destroy and to overthrow'*.³ The prophet had helped people to let go of the false world that is under threat from the Holy One. But Jeremiah remembered his full call which included a word about, *'building and planting'*.⁴ Out of this call comes Jeremiah's hope. This hope is expressed in the prophet's voicing in the oracle of the LORD (vv.7-8).

The prophet's vitality comes from a passionate conviction about the power of the LORD to work newness in the hour of loss and exile. Jeremiah's GOD is an independent agent with a plan. This plan is Israel's only real hope as long as they are in exile. In the face of a world that has failed them, the prophet voices the newness of GOD in terms of *'homecoming'*. Earlier Jeremiah had judged the Babylonian triumph was the will of the LORD. Now, in the midst of exile, his message is that the LORD wills to have the displaced Israelites leave from the alien

1 Cover image: Jesus heals blind Bartimaeus.

2 The biblical excerpts are drawn from the New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), published by Oxford University Press (1994).

3 Cf. Jr.1:10a

4 *Ibid.* v.10b

empire and that they come home with joy and that they make a new beginning in a restored Jerusalem. The alternative is to accept Babylonian management which would never yield a vision towards which the Israelites could live. Where there's no vision, the people perish.

The prophet abandons any cause for caution or doubt on the part of GOD's people, concerning the shape of their ultimate future. No distinction is drawn between faithful Israelites and all of humankind. *ALL peoples* will participate in the feast in '*the reigning of GOD*', when all sorrow and death will be decisively overruled. Mount Zion, the site of Solomon's temple, earned a place in Israelite thought as the special place of the divine-human meeting. Zion was the place above all others, where the LORD meets the people.⁵ After the exile, Zion became the focus of the deepest Israelite hopes for a new future.⁶ The prophet affirms those hopes and the role of Zion.

A hint of judgement appears in the verse affirming that the shroud and woven sheet that cover "*all nations*". They will be destroyed by the LORD (v.7). The fabrics seem to be emblems of mourning. The grieving is over the reality of human failure, or the apparent absence of the LORD from Israelite life. According to the prophet, the cause of mourning has been removed. The LORD is present. The LORD has, '*swallowed up death (and sin) forever*'.

Jeremiah recalls other prophets who warned of the impending, '*Day of the LORD*', when the Earth would be laid waste and human sinfulness punished (v.9). '*That Day*' is coming, he declares; and it will be an occasion when the long-awaited appearance of GOD will take place. Since it is the nature of the LORD to save, '*that Day*' will be a time of gladness and great joy. The prophet declares the ultimate redemption of faithful people and the joyful inauguration of the reigning of *the Day of the LORD*. He carries the announcement of salvation a daring step further: not just a faithful remnant will be saved; not just the Israelites; *ALL peoples* will be delivered! The LORD will banish sorrow from, '*all faces*'. Sin and death will be exiled from '*ALL the Earth*'. Implied in the prophet's thought, is a realisation that the LORD who made creation good in the first instance, has the power and desire to restore creation to goodness in the end.

response: Psalm 126 : 1 – 6

[the security of God's people]

*When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion,
we were like those who dream.(1)
Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with shouts of joy;
then it was said among the nations,
"The LORD has done great things for them".(2)*

5 Cf. Pss.15 & 24 – For Ezekiel, the liberating word to exiles in Babylon was – that the LORD's presence is not limited to the far-off Jerusalem temple (Ezk.10:18-22)

6 Jl.3:17

The LORD has done great things for us, and we rejoiced.(3)
Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like the watercourses in the Negeb.(4)
May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy.(5)
Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.(6)

The speaker cries for help on behalf of the Israelite community. What the LORD has done in the past becomes the basis of what the community now asks from GOD. The awed comments of the Israelite's neighbours, "*the LORD has done great things for them*" (v.2) becomes, "*the LORD has done great things for us*" (v.3). Then the speaker prays, "*Redeem us again, O LORD, as You redeemed us before*" (v.4).⁷ The prayer is an insistent cry to the LORD to act decisively and generously to help them. The turn-around from tears to joy, involves all conceivable happiness, moral as well as material (v.6).⁸ Tears symbolise death and the shouts of joy symbolise new life. By contrasting tears and weeping with shouts of joy, there's a hint that a resurrection will follow the present sorrow.

Its the memory of the LORD's past actions that anchor the speaker's hope. Prayers are directed to the LORD, who has a long and distinguished record of rescuing activity. Because they could remember that history, the speaker hopes for a new present and future with the LORD. The memory of former joyful times enabled the people to see beyond their present sorry state.

The Christian community also remembers GOD's saving deeds but that memory is focused in Jesus of Nazareth – his birth, his life, and his death and resurrection. Because we remember what GOD has done in Jesus, we too hope and expect that GOD who came once will come again. In the meantime the Christian community actualises the living Christ to the world, by means of witness and works of service. The Holy GOD has indeed done great things for us and we can rejoice!

second reading: Hebrews 5 : 1 – 6⁹

[God's Son the eternal high priest]

Every high priest chosen from among mortals is put in charge of things pertaining to GOD on their behalf, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.(1)
He is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is subject to weakness;(2) and because of this he must offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people.(3) And one does not presume to take this honour, but takes it only when called by GOD, just as Aaron was.(4) So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high

7 The prayer likens their situation to the Negeb desert to the south of Judah, which during most of the year is bone-dry but with the coming of the winter rains the region's rivers are brought to life and overflow their banks.

8 The idea that rejoicing follows weeping finds an echo in the gospel of John (cf. *Jn.16:20*).

9 *Hb.5:1-6* - the true humanity of Jesus makes him a more rather than a less effective high priest to the Christian community. In the Israelite tradition, the high priest was identified with the people, guilty of personal sin just as they were (vv.1-3). Even so, the office was of divine appointment (v.4), as was also the case with the sinless Christ (v.5).

priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you";(5) as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek."(6)

Jesus was *THE gift of GOD!* He is like other Israelite high priests in his selection, vulnerability and function. The contrast between Jesus and other high priests, establishes his superiority, but the author does not demean other Israelite high priests. The priestly duty to offer sacrifice, linked to ritual defilement or sin, shows the offerer is in solidarity with and for human persons before the throne of the LORD. Jesus Christ, as a human being, represents all humankind. He shared their sufferings in his compassion for them. Jesus suffered in this way throughout his life and especially in his agony and death – thus according to the author – he qualified for high priest.¹⁰

Jesus was tough yet submissive with GOD. He was deeply concerned for, yet utterly free, in the way he dealt with people (v.2).¹¹ He didn't try to slot things or reduce life with GOD to a system. He kept living a full life that was open to GOD. The capacity to be open to GOD, leads to life with a vision. The high-priestly role requires deep concern for, yet utter freedom from, human persons. In Jesus' relations with people, he resisted the temptation to take responsibility for others – to do for them what they would not do for themselves. He practised deep concern for, and complete disengagement from, others.

This comparison of Jesus' priesthood with that of human priesthood allows the writer to say something about the particular functions of human priests. They are, *"put in charge of things pertaining to GOD"*. They are, *"subject to weakness"* and *"must offer sacrifice"* for their sins. They are designated by GOD, *"And one does not presume to take this honour, but takes it only when called by GOD"*. For the writer, the psalm applies to Jesus' resurrection (cf *Ps.2:7*). Jesus, the Christ, embarked upon the function of Son – that is – Messiah and high priest, at his raising. He was appointed as Son and high priest. Israelite Messianism is functional. *Ps.2* originally celebrated a king's coronation. From the resurrection, Jesus the Christ, embarked upon the functions of kingship; that is, the functions of the Son of GOD. According to the writer, Christ's high priestly work is performed *"in heaven"*. Calvary is only a preliminary performance.¹²

10 [v.1] *'To offer gifts and sacrifices for sins'*: - the author is thinking principally of the Day of Atonement rite, (cf.*Hb.9:7*). This ritual was celebrated to atone for *"all the sins of the Israelites"* (cf *Lev 16:34*).

11 [v.2] *'Deal gently'*: the Greek word, *metriopathein*, occurs only here in the Bible; this term was used by the Stoics to designate *the golden mean* between excess and defect of passion. Here it means more the ability to sympathise with.

12 Although Jesus was Son of GOD, he was destined as a human being to learn obedience by accepting the suffering he had to endure. See *Hb.5:8ff* The author of *Hebrews* is the only New Testament writer to cite *Ps.110:4*, here and in *Hb.7:17 & 21*, to show that Jesus has been called by GOD to his role as priest (v.6).

gospel reading: **Mark 10 : 46 – 52**

[the healing of blind Bartimaeus]

They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside.(46) When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"(47) Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"(48) Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you."(49) So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus.(50) Then Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said to him, "My teacher, let me see again."(51) Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.(52)

The story of the meeting between Bartimaeus and Jesus is a story of becoming a disciple – the tenacity of a Bartimaeus, and an answering response from Jesus.¹³ In the account of Bartimaeus' transformation, Jesus' response even affects the onlookers, who become agents of his invitation. Jesus left Jericho with the disciples and a large noisy crowd following him. Bartimaeus, a blind man begging at the roadside, asked about the noise and was told that Jesus of Nazareth was passing. Bartimaeus shouted out: "*Son of David, Jesus, have pity on me*" (v.47).¹⁴

Blind Bartimaeus heard the hubbub and the excitement of the crowd. He must have thought, "*This is it!*" When told that it was Jesus, he called out loudly because he wanted to see, and he believed Jesus was a liberator. "*Have pity on me*", is the cry of a person who feels humiliated, poor and dependent. But the cry is addressed to Jesus, who gives hope. When he calls out to Jesus, "*Son of David . . .*", he is calling Jesus leader of the Israelites. He '*sees*' and the crowd are '*blind*'. His cry is subversive. The blind beggar voices an incredible act of hope. Silence is the way to keep people hopeless and to keep them beggars. Perhaps his cry embarrassed the on-lookers. Perhaps the onlookers knew that if Bartimaeus got healed he would compete for their jobs. But Bartimaeus cried out, "*all the louder*" (v.48). He refused to remain hopeless and silent.

Nazareth was an unimportant place. It seems they called Jesus '*the Nazarene*' as a kind of nickname. They told the blind man that *Jesus, the Nazarene*, was passing (v.46). But the blind man doesn't call Jesus by that name. He shouts, "*Jesus, Son of David*". Isaiah had prophesied that the Messiah would come, "*to give*

13 [v.46] *Bartimaeus*: - means "*Son of Timaeus*" in Aramaic.

14 At that time people had begun to give the Messiah the title, '*Son of David*'. The Psalms of Solomon from that period, announce that '*the Son of David*' would free the Israelites from their enemies, drive sinners out of the country, destroy immoral nations, establish justice throughout the world, and rule over a great people.

*sight to the blind, to make the deaf hear, to cure the sick, to free the captives".*¹⁵ By asking Jesus to give him sight Bartimaeus is proclaiming him Messiah.

The blind beggar could have asked for alms. *"Have pity on me"*, could have been such a request. But the people were expecting *'the Son of David'* to give sight to the blind and health to the sick, etc.. Bartimaeus knew about Jesus. He didn't ask him for money. Along the way of Jesus' journey there must have been other beggars – some of them must have been blind also. Jesus didn't do anything for them. They didn't ask for any thing. They didn't believe in him. Jesus cured Baritmaeus and he praised GOD. He was affirming that GOD had sent the Messiah and he was praising GOD for that.

'Praising GOD', 'blessing GOD' and 'giving thanks to GOD' mean the same in the Israelite scriptures. It is a proclamation of freedom from oppression – a different praising of GOD from modern Pentecostalism. The blind man having already heard about Jesus' practise; already believed he was the Messiah or Liberator. According to Mark's gospel, that's having faith. The healing at Bethsaida (*Mk.8:22-26*) which opened this sequence about discipleship and full understanding or vision, showed it is the crowd who are blind while the blind man understands Jesus' work and wants to see. Here, the crowd is compared to a blind man. Peter is earlier compared to the blind man, who at first sees a little, and then at a second stage, sees clearly.¹⁶ Mark again shows that for discipleship, a person has to violate convention and have faith enough to risk leaving everything. This poor bugger leaves behind his begging profession, pushes beyond the abuse from the crowd, reaches Jesus, and then follows him; his life transformed.¹⁷

for sharing:¹⁸

- *The joyful return of exiles. Comment on Jeremiah 31 : 7 – 9*
- *GOD's Son the eternal high priest. Comment on Hebrews 5 : 1 – 6*

15 *Is.40:3-5*

16 Cf. *Mk.8:22-26*

17 Mark places the event late in Jesus' ministry, just before his entrance into Jerusalem, and Matthew followed Mark at that point in his gospel also (see *Mt.20:29-34*). In each of the Matthean stories the single blind man of Mark becomes two. The reason why Matthew would have given a double version of the Marcan story and placed the earlier one here may be that he wished to add a story of Jesus' curing the blind at this point in order to prepare for Jesus' answer to the disciples of the Baptist (cf. *Mt.11:4-6*) in which Jesus, telling of his works, begins with his giving sight to the blind.

18 **Lectio Divina:** There are four steps in the traditional practise of *lectio divina*. The steps don't have to have the following order: **lectio (reading)** – read the passage of Scripture read slowly - more than once. If a particular word, phrase, or sentence seems significant (even if you don't know why) you may want to write it down. **meditatio (reflection)** – let the significant words fill your mind without straining to analyse them. We are in God's presence and so let the Holy Spirit lead your understanding of the words. **oratio (prayer)** – allow your heart to speak to GOD, in words inspired by the passage of Scripture, or by the thoughts that have come to you, while reflecting on it. **contemplatio (rest)** – let go of ideas and words and allow yourself to rest in the presence of GOD, in simple and wordless contemplation. Familiarity with the texts and the commentary beforehand, can better prepare our hearing and understanding the passages in our worship. Whatever our preparation for doing this exercise and whatever questions we may use to break open the passage, we must be conscious of Christ's promise: *'Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them'*.

- *The healing of blind Bartimaeus. Comment on **Mark 10 : 46 – 52***

prayer:¹⁹

*Have pity on us, GOD our Saviour.
Grant us grace and courage
to cast off our sins
and turn to you for healing.
Show us in Christ the sure path of salvation
and strengthen us to follow gladly
in the way of the gospel.
We ask this through
our LORD Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
GOD for ever and ever. Amen.*

the review:²⁰

Each Sunday is our celebration of the resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection of Jesus reminds would-be disciples like us, that we have entered new free territory. Along with the original people of the promise, coming back from exile, we shout the joy of deliverance: "The LORD does great things for us!" This liberation is not for would-be disciples alone. We are tempted to keep for ourselves the benefits of this newness. But the movement in Jesus' teaching is for the disciple to extend her compassion to others, so they too can rejoice in Jesus' divine mercy. The creation of an atmosphere of mercy and compassion is a necessary consequence of Christian discipleship. And living in such an atmosphere, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, is possible. The Israelite and Christian Scriptures affirm this truth again and again – that GOD is wonderfully gracious even towards our worst performances.

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19 **The prayer that concludes the Lectio Divina is ICEL's 1998 opening prayer from the Proper of the Day.** These prayers draw upon the concrete and vivid images of Scripture and conclude with a clearly focused petition inspired by the readings.

20 **the review:** – at the end of each reflection the review examines one of the themes of the readings, usually drawn from the gospel, and provides an opportunity to check our own performance, in the light of the Word and Eucharist that we have previously heard and experienced.