

Twenty-Second Sunday after Trinity
October 28, 2018
Homily for the Anglican Usage Mass
of the
St. Thomas More Catholic Parish
celebrated at
St. Joseph Catholic Church
Scranton, PA
Mark 10:46-52

The miraculous healing we heard about in the Gospel today took place in Jericho, whereupon Bartimaeus, the man healed of his blindness, followed Jesus on the way. Jesus restored the man's sight, and then of his own volition Bartimaeus followed our Lord. Therefore, where Jesus was going is of the utmost importance, if we are to understand this story.

Jericho is more than eight hundred feet below sea level, just six miles from the River Jordan. From Jericho Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem, just seventeen miles away, but over twenty-three hundred feet above sea level. That means that the ascent is rather rapid, that the Lord and His disciples were hiking up a mountain through a desert, no easy walk by any means. This is Bartimaeus' first journey with Jesus, so we see how important it is indeed that he is able to see exactly where he is going.

Remember that Jesus has told His disciples that he is going to Jerusalem to die, and after three days He will rise. Jesus has told them explicitly about His rejection by the ruling authorities and how He will suffer greatly in His Passion. Therefore, to follow Jesus on the way to Jerusalem is to be willing with James and John, whom we heard from last week, to be baptized with Jesus' baptism and to drink the chalice that Jesus must drink. To follow Jesus up to Jerusalem is to accept the cross that Jesus will carry first.

Now Bartimaeus could have stayed in Jericho, newly healed and able finally to enjoy his hometown. Jericho is one of the oldest cities in the world, with a climate that is always summer. The city is fed by a spring that allows it to be a center for agriculture even though it is literally in the middle of the desert. Even today it serves as a retreat from the much harsher environment in Jerusalem.

So Bartimaeus can see that he is leaving an oasis in order to carry the cross of Christ. Why would one do this, leave a lush area with plenty of food and water to trek through a desert up a mountain to suffer even greater indignities once one has finally arrived? Bartimaeus is the model for those of us who follow Jesus, even as we are able to see exactly what we're getting into. Bartimaeus is the model for those who leave comfort behind, even one's own hometown, in order to embrace the sacrifice that issues in freedom for many.

Why do we do it? Well, most obviously, we are willing to follow Jesus up the mountain to His crucifixion because we know already that He has healed us. If we have benefitted from the Lord's healing hands, it is easy to follow Him wherever He may lead us. Having been made whole, we know that His purpose is our healing and life, not our destruction and death. Even if we do have to walk through a desert to the cross, exerting ourselves all the way, we know that it is for the sake of life. Having been healed, we follow because we trust Him to lead us.

What we see here, though, is more than trust. Just because we trust someone doesn't necessarily mean we are willing to suffer with Him. In order to walk the way of the cross, our trust must be complemented

by love, a particular affection for the Man and His mission. I trust that what He is doing is for the good, because He has healed me; but I am willing to suffer with Him because I love Him.

The love that I have for Him must necessarily encompass those whom He loves. I can hardly say that I love Jesus but do not love those He loves. This would make no sense, as it would in some measure deny His love for me. How am I different from the blind beggars Jesus has yet to heal? I'm not, for I was one of those blind beggars before He came into my life. Therefore, I will love whom He loves.

What this means is that I will be willing to sacrifice for them, just as Jesus sacrifices Himself for them. But it also means I can see what Jesus sees. Before receiving his sight, Bartimaeus could be excused for wanting to remain in the relative comfort of Jericho. But after his healing, Bartimaeus could see how many others needed to receive our Lord's healing touch. To remain in Jericho would be to deprive other blind beggars of the very benefits I've myself received. Thus, I will happily climb the mountain if it means loving those Jesus loves.

So this is where we find ourselves. Jesus has healed us of our blindness, brought us into communion with Him, even as He continues on, reaching out to those who are still blind. We see, for example, that violence is not the way to resolve our disagreements. We do not send people bombs, but God's love. We do not insist that our adversaries must all be killed, but that they be converted to the Truth. We see that when we make sacrifices for those who are blind, hearts are softened and opened to the Love that transforms lives. This is something we want to share, something we see clearly needs to be shared. So if I have to walk through a desert up a mountain to share it, I will do so. Our comfort in Jericho is not nearly so attractive when we can see clearly how many others are so very uncomfortable. We will leave physical comfort for the comfort of a clear conscience. Love compels us to walk up the mountain, compels us to help others see what we could not see before.