

HOMILY SUNDAY 30 – B (Homily 03)*

“Faith to Heal and Follow”

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

Appreciating the readings for today’s liturgy can be compared to watching a movie. Often the movie begins by introducing two or more plots and a number of characters, with no seeming connection. Eventually, the two or more plots start to merge into the one story and the main message of the movie.

Today, the first reading from Jeremiah provides the first plot. The Gospel provides the second and main plot – both giving us a clear message of faith in Jesus’ power to heal, and the call to follow Jesus as his disciples.

In the first reading, the prophet Jeremiah prophesies that in the future God will save a remnant of the Chosen People. God will bring them forth, or call them back to God’s self, including the blind and the lame. He stresses that God will lead them by waterways in the desert, and along straight paths through the hills. God will once again be a father to Israel and Ephraim – a cause of great joy.

With this plot in mind, we are now ready to plumb the fuller meaning of the gospel passage. Bartimeus can be seen as representing the people of Israel, in all their woundedness and need. He is blind and forced to beg for his sustenance. However, when he hears that it is Jesus passing by, he brushes off the initial efforts of the crowd to silence him and shouts out to Jesus to save him. He addresses Jesus by the ancient Hebrew title for the messiah, *Son of David*, thus further identifying himself with the Chosen People of God.

Hearing that cry and that title, Jesus stood still, and called Bartimeus to him. Imagine the drama of this moment in a movie. Jesus does not just stop moving. No - he “stood still”, responding to the cry of Bartimeus. It was like that is what Jesus was waiting for – not just curious people wanting to see him and perhaps see something sensational, but someone with faith in him as the Son of David to be healed. Is this not what Jeremiah prophesied in the first reading – that God would call to himself a new people, including the blind and the lame?

To their credit, the crowd then reverses its stance and encourages Bartimeus to go to Jesus. Bartimeus, for his part, throws off his cloak. That cloak is his security; his identity; his means of livelihood as a beggar. The fact that he throws it off accentuates his faith in Jesus to heal him. He is willing to let go of that part of his life, to open himself up to the new life that Jesus can offer him.

By this act of faith and willingness to change, Bartimeus is in contrast with especially the religious leaders of Jesus' day, who resisted the call of Jesus. They were unable to let go of their positions of wealth, prestige and power that their religious roles gave them over the common people.

Bartimeus also presents a challenge to us, in our own need for forgiveness and healing. Are we willing to let go of our old habits, our addictions, our character defects, to trust completely in Jesus' healing power, and open ourselves up to the new way of life that Jesus is offering us, and calling us into?

Fr. Doug, as a young priest, tried to form a basic Christian community with some religious and laity. He was hampered in this effort by having grown up in a dysfunctional home which left him with a sense of insecurity in his own being, and a sense of never being good enough. He had also inherited his father's workaholicism and his mother's codependency as the adult child of an alcoholic.

As a result, he found himself not really knowing how to live nor how to love. He also had not accepted himself as he was, and was always trying to prove something. These traits were so strong in him that the little community eventually dissolved. Twenty five later, he experienced a midlife crisis and found that he was finally being almost forced to face these character defects and deal with these issues in his life with the help of some therapy, soul-searching and much prayer.

Once he was healed, Bartimeus was invited by Jesus to follow him along the way. That is the invitation that the readings extend to us – to allow ourselves to be called back to God, to be healed of our sin and sinfulness, and to follow Jesus along a new path as his disciples, living in the reign of God, and forming the Church, the new people of God.

The Eucharist we celebrate today is both a source of healing and growth for us, and also an empowerment for us to go out and follow Jesus along the way, serving our brothers and sisters in need.

So let us dare to be like Bartimeus; respond to Jesus' call to us and come to him for healing so that we might be his disciples following him along the way into the reign of God, a life of love, freedom and joy. As Jeremiah put it, there is great cause for rejoicing here.