

When I was a little boy, going to school for the first time in our 2-room school house at Sacred Heart in Bethlehem (the oldest continuously-operating school in the State of Ohio!), it was quite an adventure. One Sister of Notre Dame taught four grades in one classroom! We first graders were up front on the left side, closest to the teacher's desk and the blackboard, and it was a little overwhelming at first.

After a few weeks the Sister called my mom for a conference. She was worried about me—she thought I was bright, but I wasn't responding correctly to the things she was asking, particularly with lessons on the blackboard. So she wanted me to have my eyes tested. This was long before a battery of all kinds of tests was required before a child could enter the classroom. So we went to the local optometrist, and to my mother's horror, we found that I was extremely nearsighted, almost legally blind. I couldn't see the blackboard writing even from the first row.

I will never forget coming home from the optometrist a week or so later, with my first pair of thick-lensed glasses. I couldn't believe it—the universe had edges! Trees weren't just green blobs, they were beautiful intricate creations. I can still remember that day, 70 years ago—absolute stunned delight!

This morning's gospel is another wonderful story of blindness and a truly miraculous restoration of sight. Bartimaeus, the blind man begging on the side of the road, showed tremendous faith. Mark says that when Bartimaeus heard Jesus was approaching, he threw aside his cloak, his most precious possession, perhaps his only possession, to go to him.

I always wondered what Bartimaeus thought then when Jesus asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?” I’ll bet he had to bite his tongue from giving some smart remark, like “What do you think I want? I’m not looking for a Cadillac here! I want to see!” But anyway, Jesus did heal him, and when he did, he told him, “go your way.” Instead, Bartimaeus went *Jesus’ way*. Mark tells us that he immediately began to go the way that Jesus was going. That took as much faith to do as it did to be healed, I suppose, because he didn’t know where Jesus was headed or what lay ahead.

Isn’t that true of us too? We want to follow Jesus, but we’re never quite sure, and maybe even apprehensive about where he is going to take us. Perhaps that is why so many people hesitate to follow him too closely. After all, didn’t he say, “if anyone would come after me, he must take up his *cross* and follow me”? Like James and John in last week’s gospel, who asked to sit at Jesus’ right and left when he entered into his glory, we are very happy to *reign* with him, but we’re not so keen on *dying* with him.

Jesus spent three years trying to heal blindness, not just the blindness of scratched corneas or detached retinas, but usually the *blindness in our minds and hearts*: the blindness of our prejudices, our un-forgiveness, our selfishness and self-centeredness, our criticism of others without seeing our own faults, even our blindness to our own good qualities, just to name a few examples.

I think another form of blindness is the blindness of *unbelief in Jesus’ death and resurrection*. “What?” you say. “I believe in Jesus’ death and resurrection. I wouldn’t be here at Mass, if I didn’t. We profess it every time we say the Creed.” That is true, but it is only half the story.

The other half comes when we can apply it to our lives, trusting that when we faithfully follow Jesus, *even out of our own crosses*, he can bring resurrection and life. As St. Paul tells us, “We know that all things work for good for those who love God.” (Rom. 8:28)

Do we believe that, when we lose someone we love, when we see ourselves growing older or more debilitated, when we have to say goodbye to some of our fondest dreams, when the people or the world around us change in ways we do not like? Please don't misunderstand me. I'm not promoting needless suffering. When I'm sick, I call a doctor. But we all face tragic situations about which nothing can be done. Do we then retreat into bitterness, resentment, despair? Or do we choose to live in the faith and hope *of God's ability to bring life out of death*? Are we willing to follow Jesus to *Calvary* so that we can experience *resurrection*?

Imprisoned by our many blind spots, I'm afraid that often we, like Bartimaeus, sit by the side of the road of life, begging for whatever crumbs this world might throw our way. Let us pray today, *with* Bartimaeus, “Master, I want to see!” so that I can follow you better, for you are the way!