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Last year I went on a minibus ride with clients of a center for people with disabilities in Ecuador. Sitting next to me was Letitia, a petite, wrinkled and worn 60-year-old woman who was propping up her severely disabled 7-year-old grandson, Jimmy. As we chatted, she talked of how grateful she was that while the boy received therapy, a special education teacher was teaching her to read and write. As Jimmy's only caretaker and support, Letitia was determined to learn to read lest anyone take advantage of them.

She admitted that it was very hard. Her hands were more accustomed to caring for animals and cooking than to holding a pen, but she explained that once she got a secondhand pair of reading glasses, the task seemed possible and she could already sign her own name. She ended her story with her standard refrain, "Gracias a Dios."

I was overwhelmed by her combination of courage and humility, fairly certain that I could never have summoned the necessary grit to tackle the task of becoming literate at that age. Our conversation reminded me of how effortlessly education, nutrition and countless opportunities have come to me, of how easy it is to keep my hands clean.

Letitia represents many of the people God sends to tutor the affluent. A bit like Bartimaeus, the blind beggar of today's Gospel who desired only to be able to see, she believes God will give her the help she needs in spite of the odds.

Bartimaeus initiated his first encounter with Jesus while sitting along the way Jesus was walking on his final journey up to Jerusalem. Bartimaeus, whose name comes from the word honorable (timaaios), was not about to let his opportunity go by. He called on Jesus as a royal son of David who was a king responsible to care for the poor. We echo his shout each time we pray Kyrie eleison. That prayer is a plea for God's effective mercy, the grace that gives us what we need for faithful discipleship at any moment. The image that might best portray eleison-mercy is what the father in Luke 15 gave his prodigal son: He didn't simply forgive him but brought him home and gave him a position from which he could be a truer son than he had ever been before.

Mark wove this story to make an artful contrast between the disciples and Bartimaeus. Ever since Jesus had turned toward Jerusalem he had been trying to prepare his disciples for all that was to come, but they refused to see his point. When James and John petitioned Jesus to do anything they asked, he made them spell out their shameless ambition before informing them that prestige was not his to distribute. When Jesus asked Bartimaeus what he wanted from him, Bartimaeus responded without hesitation, "Master, I want to see." Bartimaeus wanted precisely what the disciples were avoiding: to see things clearly. His was the request Jesus had longed to grant and one that he could grant only to someone who had the faith and courage to ask for it.

Mark tells us that instead of touching his eyes or laying his hands on him, Jesus simply told Bartimaeus to go his way because his faith had saved him and that he immediately received his sight. With that, Bartimaeus determined that Jesus' way would now be his and he began to follow him on the way.

It would be interesting to hear how Bartimaeus might have explained his new vocation to the disciples who were resisting Jesus' teaching. Perhaps he would have told them that until Jesus healed him, he was incapable of following — and that there were many levels of meaning to that. Blindness had imprisoned him in a small, hazardous world in which he could never be certain of where he was going. Perhaps like Letitia who repeats her “Gracias a Dios” about every dimension of her life, he told them that having experienced Jesus as the Son of David for the poor, he wanted to see all of life from Jesus' perspective. Perhaps he simply said, “I am so grateful, I never want to lose sight of him.”

Perhaps today Bartimaeus would tell us what Pope Francis has said in *Evangelii Gaudium*. When we are tempted to keep the Lord's wounds at arm's length, Jesus invites us to touch human misery and the suffering flesh of others: “He hopes that we will stop looking for those personal or communal niches which shelter us from ... human misfortune and ... enter into the reality of other people's lives” (#270).

People like Letitia and Bartimaeus are all around us. Without any ordination or theological degree, they are here to teach us that our vocation is all about relying on and becoming sources of God's mercy.

## **JEREMIAH 31:7-9**

This selection is taken from a series of hope-filled proclamations in what is often referred to as Jeremiah's Book of Consolation (Jeremiah 30-33). Today's selection is a highly emotional call to rejoice because God who allowed the people to go into exile is bringing them back. (The series includes Jeremiah 31:2-40.) This oracle comes from the mouth of God whose first command is, “Shout with joy!” The spectacle Jeremiah envisions here would rival any Super Bowl parade while it simultaneously stands in countercultural contrast to conventional celebrations of victory.

First of all, as the people whoop and shout, trilling cries of joy, their jubilation has nothing whatever to do with their own impressiveness, expertise or merit. All the credit goes to the God who delivers them.

Not only does God deserve all the credit, but this returning remnant is comprised of the very people considered the most vulnerable and even disposable members of society. God seems to have little interest in gathering a group of warriors, merchants or priests. The marchers in this victory procession are the blind and the lame, pregnant women and mothers with newborns. If there were ever an assembly needing God's protection as they journey to their homeland, this is it. This gathering, so truly deserving of the name “remnant of Israel” that they could be deemed culture's left-overs, is the group God has chosen to bring the chosen people back to life.

This scene repeats the storyline Israel has seen played out in multiple iterations, beginning with humanity's second generation. The people chosen to carry forward the divine plan for humanity are rarely the quick of mind and strong of body. As happened with Abel and Cain, Jacob and Esau, and even Ephraim and Manasseh (Genesis 48:1-20), God's eye and choice fall on the lesser, the younger, the weaker. As St. Paul would later teach, God chooses the foolish to shame the wise, the weak to shame the strong. God chooses the people the world may deem as redundant to be the carriers of prophecy and divine blessing for all. This is God's doing.

From the vantage point of the 21st century, it is hard to miss this throng's similarity to the displaced masses who are today fleeing their homelands and seeking a safe haven where life can thrive. The people making today's pilgrimages do not have doctorates or wealth, perhaps not even the strength that established societies need to replace their aging populations. But in the history of God's inversions of established values, these are the ones through whom God is promising new life. Through the mouth of the prophet Jeremiah, God still tells the world, “I will gather them from the ends of the world. ... I will console and guide them. ... For I am a father.” Those who desire to be a part of God's family should take heed.

## **PSALMS 126:1-2, 23- 4-5, 6**

Psalms 126, probably composed to be sung by pilgrims ascending into Jerusalem, is a short, compact prayer of gratitude and petition. Carefully crafted, the structure of the psalm works from both ends toward the middle.

The first and last stanzas speak of the rejoicing that happens when God reverses the fortunes of people who have been displaced from their homeland. Inside that proclamation comes the public display of God's power: The nations see that those who sowed in tears return rejoicing. Those verses all point to the centerpiece, “The Lord has done great things of

us; we are filled with joy.” Beyond its structure, the psalm’s theology proclaims God’s ongoing activity in the life of the chosen people. Thus, it is a call to memory and to hope.

In the light of the first reading, Psalm 126 invites us to look at the events of our lives and what is happening in our world and to discern what God is doing in our midst. Our religious genealogy, the stories of Israel and Jesus, have taught us how to recognize God’s fingerprints in history. The first reading summarized it by saying that we will find God working for the salvation and restoration of the poorest and most vulnerable, the ones who know that they will never have the power to save themselves.

Because this psalm recognizes God as the salvation of the poor and vulnerable, it becomes a challenge for comfortable Christians to pray it with integrity. Every one of us who wants to pray this psalm must make our own personal and communal inventory so that we can remember the ways in which God has saved us. That memory will not only inspire gratitude, but also lead us to a renewed commitment to further the work of God in our own society on behalf of those most in need of having their weeping turned to joy.

## **HEBREWS 5:1-6**

To Scripture scholars, this selection from Hebrews might seem to be cut off before its conclusion. The entire section of Chapter 5:1-10 sets up the comparison between Israel’s historical high priests and Jesus, the definitive high priest appointed by God. Our selection stops just as the pastor/author of Hebrews cites two psalms to describe Jesus as the true high priest.

Unlike many passages in the Gospels and Acts, Hebrews refrains from criticizing the traditional Jewish religious leaders of the day. Rather than critique the old, the author wants to help his listeners remember how God has operated in the past so that they can be caught up in wonder and joy over what is happening in their midst.

The high priest of the Jewish tradition was a person (the text uses the word for “person,” not “man”) like any other except for the fact of having been chosen by God for the role to be fulfilled. The author puts great emphasis on the fact that no one can choose the role but must be chosen by God.

From there, the author begins to reflect on Christ. As in other parts of the letter, the author reverences the fact that Jesus enjoyed everything and yet suffered everything implied in being fully human. Thus, even his role as high priest came from God. He fulfilled that vocation in obedience, not autonomy.

The two psalms the author cites reinforce the fact that Christ’s priesthood was a vocation. First of all, he points out that Jesus was called as God’s begotten son. The second psalm citation, “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek,” asserts God’s absolute and free autonomy. God established a priesthood through Aaron, and that is the origin of the traditional priesthood. Nevertheless, the God who first called a priesthood into being has the sovereign freedom to call differently. Thus, Christ’s priesthood, like that of Melchizedek, is of a different order. When we keep that in mind, the emphasis of this selection is on the priestly Christ’s obedience to God’s call — which he fulfilled in circumstances that the tradition had not foreseen.

## **MARK 10:46-52**

This is the last miracle in Mark’s Gospel — as long as we don’t count the anti-miracle of Jesus cursing the fig tree (11:12-14). While it is the last, and therefore by some measures, the greatest, what is more striking is the fact that this is the second time Jesus heals a blind man in this Gospel. These two healing miracles sandwich Jesus’ three attempts to get his disciples to understand who he was in the light of his upcoming passion.

The first healing (Mark 8:22-26) was also the only time Jesus’ healing power did not work immediately and totally; Jesus had to touch the man’s eyes twice before he saw clearly. The first blind man was very much like the disciples whom Jesus had to teach again and again before they began to see clearly who he was.

We first hear of Bartimaeus as he sits begging alongside the road Jesus was taking to Jerusalem. That position is important. He was beside Jesus’ “way,” but not yet on it. Bartimaeus heard the news that Jesus was near and began to shout and make a scene with a very specific and insistent exclamation: “Son of David, have pity on me.”

In Mark's Gospel, Bartimaeus was the first person to speak of Jesus as a Son of David and his use of that title prepared for the way the crowds who would welcome Jesus into Jerusalem with that same title (Mark 11:10). By recognizing Jesus as the son of David, Bartimaeus was calling him to respond as a particular kind of royal savior. Isaiah had prophesied that the Davidic king would bring justice for the poor and needy (11:4). Psalm 72 describes the ideal king as one who rescues the poor when they cry out. Those allusions provide a backdrop to interpret Bartimaeus' cry and recognition of who Jesus was.

Additionally, Bartimaeus called out a very specific request. He begged, "Have pity on me!" He wasn't asking for the pity or compassion Jesus showed people like the hungry crowd of Mark 6:30. Bartimaeus used the Greek word *eleeo* which we repeat whenever we pray, "Kyrie eleison." That word, often translated as mercy rather than pity, refers to an active desire to do something to alleviate the distress of someone who is suffering. It may, as in our penitential rite, include forgiveness, but it is more than that. Bartimaeus' plea for mercy implied that he believed Jesus had the power and the will to change his condition if only he were made aware of his need.

Bartimaeus' persistence paid off. Jesus heard his cry and called him forth. Then, inviting Bartimaeus to make his desire known as plainly as he had recently asked James and John to do, Jesus asked, "What do you want me to do for you?"

Mark designed the story of Bartimaeus to be a corrective alternative to the disciples' attitudes and actions. Bartimaeus literally started as a beggar. He approached Jesus as someone who had no influence to recommend him. From that humble position, he beseeched Jesus to show him regard and give him the help implied by his plea for mercy.

When Jesus asked just what kind of mercy he wanted, Bartimaeus replied, "Master, I want to see." In response, Jesus did nothing more than proclaim that Bartimaeus' faith had saved him. With that, Bartimaeus received his sight and began to follow Jesus along the way. Mark no sooner ends this story than he tells of how Jesus prepared to enter into the city of Jerusalem. Bartimaeus received the vision that allowed him to join Jesus on the way at its most critical juncture.

## **Planning: 30<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**By: Lawrence Mick**

This Thursday is the Solemnity of All Saints, a holyday of obligation, and Friday is All Souls' Day. Before we observe both feasts, we celebrate the 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time. Jeremiah foresees a day of deliverance for Israel, a promise that comes to pass for Bartimaeus in the Gospel. Jeremiah foretells the gathering of all God's people; a mission Jesus came to inaugurate but which remains unfinished to this day.

The second reading goes in a bit different direction, speaking of Christ as the new high priest according to the order of Melchizedek. It is this high priest who came to gather us all into God's kingdom.

The healing of Bartimaeus might prompt planners to consider how accessible our worship is for those who have physical limitations. Can blind members of the assembly proclaim the word of God with Braille texts or from memory? Can those with impaired hearing be helped with a better sound system or with individual amplification aids? Are those with limited mental ability able to minister as servers or choir members or distributors of Communion? Can those who have difficulty walking serve in ministry with some adaptations? Look around your assembly and see who might be invited to serve, even if they never thought they could.

For All Saints Day, the texts are set in the Lectionary. For All Souls' Day, there are almost too many options. There are 32 pages of readings, starting at #668 in the Sunday Lectionary, but it also notes that those given for Masses for the Dead (#1011-1016 — in the fourth volume of the Lectionary) may also be used. Missalette usually offer only one set of texts, as does the USCCB website, but many other choices are available. It might be a good day to encourage people to put down their books and listen attentively. Planners might profitably spend some time perusing the multitude of texts available to identify which ones might speak best to the local community who will gather that day.

In many parishes, All Souls' draws even fewer people than All Saints Day. It's not a day of obligation, but it could be a

fruitful time to gather those who have lost a loved one in the past year. Could you plan an evening Mass so more could take part? Could you offer a brief reception afterwards, for everyone but especially for the grieving? Some parishes create a decorated poster with the names of all those who died during the past year, displaying it throughout November.

Daylight Saving Time in North America ends next Sunday. Remind people today that they can have an extra hour sleep next Saturday night — or they can come an hour early for Mass and spend some extra time in prayer and reflection!

## Prayers: 30<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

By: Peg Ekerdt

### Introduction

Faith is a leap into the unknown. It is a risk that requires trust in something beyond self. Each one of us entertains doubt on some occasion. We have moments when we feel abandoned, in exile or alone. Today's Gospel provides a model for what we are to do in times of lonely uncertainty: Take courage, reach out and call to Jesus. Ask for what you need. Speak what is in your heart. The Lord hears and wants to do great things for us.

### Penitential Act

- Lord Jesus, you gather the blind and the lame: Lord, have mercy.
- Christ Jesus, you console and guide your people: Christ, have mercy.
- Lord Jesus, bring sight to the blind: Lord have mercy.

### Prayer of the Faithful

**Presider** Let us pray for the needs of the church, and for our world.

**Minister** For the church, for all of us, for healing of blindness that cripples our lives, for courage to hear the Lord's call in every challenge and lost moment, to live each day in the light of his love, we pray:

- For the United States, as the country prepares for mid-term elections, for honest conversations that address complex issues, for citizens who take seriously the responsibility to vote, for commitment among us all to the common good, we pray:
- In this month set aside for respect for all life, for renewed effort to call ourselves and others to a seamless garment of life, to support the woman who faces pregnancy alone, to promote just wages and fair housing, to provide equal education of all children, to treasure the unborn, we pray:
- For our children in this Halloween week, for exploration of imaginations that brings delight, for moderation in consuming sweets, for joy in creating family traditions, we pray:
- For the sick of our community, for those to whom we have promised our prayers, for those who struggle with mental health or addiction, for courage to reach out and ask for help, we pray:
- For those who have died in the past week, and for all of our beloved dead, we pray:

**Presider** God of consolation and hope, open our eyes to your presence. Fill us with courage when we feel blinded. Strengthen our faith so we are never silent in the face of fear. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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