

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)

Oct 28, 2018

There is so much imagery in our Gospel today, Jesus moving in a loud and dusty crowd, people waiting for Him to pass by, probably pleading many things, and one man whose plea is heard. Jesus responds to have him come and Bartimaeus throws off his cloak, leaps up and comes to Jesus.

What's the meaning of this seemingly insignificant detail, of Bartimaeus "threw aside his cloak, sprang up, and came to Jesus."?

Now, the cloak was protection against the rapid and frequent temperature changes, insulation against the harsh Judean winds, and at night it doubled as a blanket, especially for the poorer residents of the Holy Land, like Bartimaeus.

For us today, this cloak might symbolize all those things that we wrongly depend on for protection, insulation and warmth, that we tend to idolize: our beautiful looks, our intelligence, athletic ability, money, good education, success, popularity...

Following Christ, obeying his commandments and teachings, means putting these other things – good and valuable though they may be – into second place and trusting that friendship with God alone is the real source of the fulfillment we most yearn for.

Even before the blind man leaves his cloak behind, he shows that he has learned this lesson by his faith-filled persistence. Everyone was discouraging him from putting his trust in God, but Bartimaeus refused to be silenced, and the heart of Christ didn't let him down.

Then, when he hears the Lord's call, he does not hesitate to cast off his cloak and spring forward, teaching us all that our only sufficiency should be Jesus Christ.

Bartimaeus leaving behind his cloak in order to come closer to Christ is a perfect illustration of one of the most difficult sayings of Jesus. It's a saying we find in the Gospel of Matthew (Mt 10:59), and it's one that almost always makes us uncomfortable: "Anyone who finds his life will lose it; anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it." Bartimaeus was willing to "lose his life," to leave behind his comfort and sense of self-sufficiency, in order to put himself entirely in Christ's care. Are you willing to cast off your cloak, to leave behind your cloak of self-sufficiency?

It reminds me the story about the pig and the chicken. A chicken and a pig were walking down the street one day. They noticed some poor children who looked as if they hadn't eaten anything for days. Moved with deep compassion, the chicken said to the pig, "I have an idea! Let's give those children a nice breakfast of ham and eggs." The pig thought deeply for a few moments about the chicken's suggestion. At last, the pig, moved with even deeper compassion, said: "Well, that's a fine idea, but since it

would take a little while for you to lay some eggs, why don't I just serve them up some chicken burritos instead?" The chicken would have given something to a breakfast of ham and eggs, but it would have to give itself totally to a breakfast of chicken burritos.

Jesus needs followers who are willing to give themselves totally. Insofar as we trust him completely and follow him unconditionally, leaving all cloaks behind, we will be able to experience the full power of his transforming grace, as the blind beggar did.

Leaving our cloaks behind is a risk, and it takes faith. One of the great ironies of this Gospel passage is that the one man who couldn't see with his eyes was the only man able to see with his heart. All the other people in the crowd told him to be quiet and let Jesus pass by in peace. They didn't think Jesus would want anything to do with a poor, blind beggar on the side of the road.

But Jesus did want to have something to do with him. Jesus wants to have something to do with each one of us. He really is capable of bringing his warmth and light into the dark, cold places of our souls, just as he easily brought light to the eyes of Bartimaeus.

All we need is faith. "Your faith has saved you," he told the beggar. And he said that for our sake too, to point out where the path of interior renewal lies. It's not through yoga, transcendental meditation, and aromatherapy; it's through faith; it's through trusting in the God who created us and who died on a cross to show us how much he loves us.

We all have faith; otherwise we would not be here today. And we all know that we need a stronger faith; otherwise we would not be here today.

How can we exercise our faith and make it grow, so God's light can transform us more and more? We can do exactly what Bartimaeus did: pray. He begged the Lord from the bottom of his heart to have mercy on him. And when Jesus asked him what he wanted, he told him.

Today, during this Mass, let us do the same as Bartimaeus did. Let us throw off our cloaks, open our hearts to God, and let his light stream right on in. And prepare to respond to His question: "What can I do for you"?