

30th Sunday in Ordinary Time 2024 “Bartimaeus” Youth Convention

Bishop Frank Schuster

It is such a joy to be here with you. On behalf of Archbishop Etienne, thank you for spending this weekend together to celebrate our faith. The Gospel this weekend about the healing of Bartimaeus is perfect and it also offers me an opportunity to share with you a story about when I was young.

I was in 3rd grade. My desk was five rows back. My teacher loved using the chalk board, especially for math. (Any of you know what a chalk board is? A VHS? Scooby Doo? Back to the chalk board). It didn't take long that year for my teacher to begin wondering about the strange look on my face, the squint of my eyes, the frustrated appearance, and the inability to answer questions pertaining to what was happening on the chalk board. Since my mom worked at the school, as the music instructor, it wasn't long before they had words and soon after I was sitting in a chair before an eye doctor. Except for the nasty eye drops they used back in those days it was a tolerable experience. And, of course, the doctor said I had inherited by dad's eyes, and I would need to wear glasses. Oh, the doom. And so, afterwards my mom and I wondered through the showroom to find my first pair of glasses. And two weeks later, we received a phone call that the glasses were ready for us to pick up. I will never forget that day.

Up to that point in my life, I just assumed the world looked the way it did. I had no basis for comparison. Putting on the new pair of glasses was like going from a fuzzy 1970's television set with an aluminum reinforced rabbit ear antenna (yes, that is what we used) to a showroom top of the line wide screen HD display. My jaw dropped when I first put on the glasses and looked around at the world, the brilliant colors, the definition of distant objects and the crystal-clear clarity. On the drive home, my mother had to put up with my incessant declarations, “Wow, I can see that sign all the way from here, can you see it?” To which, my mom would politely answer, “yes Frank”.

Now, the house we lived in at the time was in a wooded area by a river. Once we got home, I spent a good hour by myself standing on the banks of that river, amazed at how beautiful it was. The memory that sticks out the most was watching the wind blowing through the ocean of alder trees across the river and realizing that the leaves had a slightly different color on the front of the leaves from the backside of the leaves that created a dramatic shimmering effect as the wind blew through the forest. It might seem silly to you, but for me it was kind of a miracle.

Vision. The gift of sight. It is something we take for granted every day. It is used often in scripture and in our homilies to describe faith. The sight that is given to us at birth isn't sufficient for seeing God. We need a different sight for that. However, we are all now challenged to see the world differently because of that amazing grace.

Any you know who Bishop Barron is and his Word on Fire ministry? In seminary, he was my Obi Won Kenobi. One of Bishop Barron's earlier books was the book “And Now I See”. In it he offers a theology of vision. He starts off with the argument that Christianity is first and

foremost a way of seeing. Everything in the Christian life flows from a transformation of vision. Christians see differently, and if we are living the faith, people see us differently. It is why people can walk into our homes and know just by looking at the walls how we see the world, what is of ultimate importance to us, pictures of our family and friends with a crucifix or an icon of our Lady someplace close by. We carry our different vision with us from this sacred place into the world. *Ora et labora*, our works flow from our prayer, our relationship with our Lord, into the world. We do our little part, St. Terese of Lisieux little way, or as Saint Teresa of Calcutta said, doing little things with great love. Through us, God transforms the world in which we live into the vision we carry within us, the Kingdom of God.

Bishop Barron writes this, he says, “What unites figures as diverse as James Joyce, Caravaggio, John Milton, the architect of Chartres, Dorothy Day, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and the later Bob Dylan is a peculiar and distinctive take on things, a style, a way, (a vision) which flow finally from Jesus of Nazareth.” He continues by pointing to some great theologians in our tradition, he says, “Origen of Alexandria once remarked that holiness is seeing with the eyes of Christ, Teilhard de Chardin says, with great passion, that his mission as a Christian thinker was to help people to *see*, and Thomas Aquinas said that the ultimate goal of the Christian life is a “beatific vision”, an act of seeing.”

All of this can help us appreciate our Gospel reading better. The blind beggar Bartimaeus discovers that the miracle worker Jesus of Nazareth is walking by him. He cries out, “Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me.” What happens next? The people around him start rebuking him, telling him to be quiet. How typical. Despite the resistance, he cries out all the louder, “Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me!” Jesus hears Bartimaeus’ cries. Jesus says, “Call him.” And it is somewhat humorous to see how quickly the crowd changes their tune. Instead of telling Bartimaeus to be quiet, they quickly change their message, “Take courage, get up, Jesus is calling you.” The irony here is, Bartimaeus had already proven himself to be the most courageous person there.

Jesus asks Bartimaeus “What do you want me to do for you.” I am always gob smacked by this question. Honestly, imagine if Jesus appeared before you and asked you point blank “What do you want me to do for you”? What would be your response? Bartimaeus asks, “Master, I want to see.” Jesus responds, “Go, your faith has saved you.” “Your faith has saved you”. We need to break that open because the Gospel says, immediately, Bartimaeus receives his sight and follows Jesus on the way. How did Bartimaeus’ faith save him? There are three moments here I want us all to consider. First, notice how Bartimaeus was persistent. He was persistent. The culture he was in tried to shame him from asking for Jesus’ help, and yet he cried out even more. That speaks to the value of persistence in the spirit life because when we seek a deeper relationship with God, the culture will always find a way to discourage us. Second, it says Bartimaeus threw aside his cloak and stood before Jesus. He is standing before Jesus naked. This speaks vividly to Bartimaeus’ willingness to be completely transparent to the Lord. How transparent and completely open are we in our relationship with the Lord? How better would our life be, if we were? Third, it says, after Bartimaeus regains his sight, the Gospel says that he left everything behind to follow Jesus. Bartimaeus did not go back to where he spent his life previously. Neither can we once Jesus gives us new sight. Jesus gave Bartimaeus new sight and

so it was Jesus he was henceforth going to follow. It is Jesus' vision that can help us understand who we are, our place in the world, and where we are going.

My friends, we can ask Jesus right now, this weekend, for the gift of new sight. We go through life so often finding our way along by braille. Jesus can give us new sight if we take some time this weekend to see ourselves, the people we love, and the world we live in with Jesus' eyes. We will need to be persistent. We will need to be transparent. And if we are given the clarity we need, we need to be willing to move from whatever rut we are in now to where Jesus wants us to follow him. Imagine, what would happen if we saw the world around us with Jesus' eyes? Would we look at our family members differently if we saw them with Jesus' eyes? Would we look at our co-workers or classmates differently if we saw them with Jesus' eyes? Would we see world events differently, dare I say even our politics differently, if we saw these things through Jesus' eyes? My friends, would you look at the person you see in the mirror differently if you saw yourself with Jesus' eyes? When we look at ourselves in the mirror each morning, we can be so judgmental of what we see, and we can be so myopic about how God sees our lives and the people in our lives. We can live so long like that we can simply think our blindness is normal. What if you looked inside your heart and saw the beauty that God sees? Can you accept the invitation to see your life with a new sight like what a man named Bartimaeus persistently asked for, and received, on the roadside near Jericho or perhaps not unlike what a third-grade boy experienced standing on a riverbank marveling at the world through his new pair of glasses? Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost and now I am found. I was blind, and now I see.