

30 Ord, Sunday B
Jeremiah 31:7-9; Hebrews 5:1-6; Mark 10:46-52
Fr. Keith McClellan
Notre Dame Church (Michigan City, IN)
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We do so many things routinely in our lives. The longer we live, we perform all the more things mindlessly. This truth came to me many years ago. It was a beautiful, sunny morning. I was doing the daily chore of making my bed. At that time, my bedroom window looked high over a beautiful valley, farmland, and a hilly forest in the distance. Unfortunately, when we encounter beautiful things on a daily basis, we soon take them for granted. We don't notice them even when we are looking. On this particular morning, as I was straightening the bedcovers and fluffing my pillow, I happened to glance toward the window and noticed something beautiful that I had never seen before. It was "a beautiful valley, farmland, and a hilly forest in the distance." But it appeared differently and freshly from what I saw everyday. I savored the epiphany for a few moments before I realized that the open windows, which cranked outward, were reflecting the same lovely, everyday reality in reverse. It was old but new! The beauty of the scene was "reborn" to me by experiencing this vista from a new perspective.

Over the last few Sundays, the gospel has portrayed several personal encounters of individuals with Jesus. Each of the individuals is asking for something. Remember the apostles James and John, catching up to Jesus, and asking if they could occupy seats on his right and on his left in the kingdom of God. They were asking for power and glory. Then, on another occasion, the rich young man approached Jesus, asking what he must do to obtain eternal life. He went away sad because he was unwilling to detach from his possessions.

In today's gospel a blind man with a name, Bartimaeus, cries out to Jesus and asks—not for power or glory, not for eternal life, and not even for physical sight—but, rather, he asks for mercy.

What stands out about Bartimaeus is that he calls on Jesus by name, adding the impressive title "Son of David," without ever having met him. In fact, he not

only calls out; he creates a ruckus. The onlookers try to shush him. Not to be denied, Bartimaeus repeats his plea for mercy.

When Jesus calls him over, Bartimaeus “springs up.” He may have been blind but he was not lame! Coming to Jesus, the Lord asks what he wants, and the man replies that he wants to see. But was physical sight really what he hoped for? Jesus virtually replies that Bartimaeus can already see, because he has *faith*: “Your faith has saved you.” Then he received physical sight.

When the rich young man had approached Jesus, Jesus advised him to sell all his possessions, give to the poor, and “come follow me.” The man went away sad. In contrast, Jesus tells Bartimaeus to go on his way, faith has saved him. But this man does not go away. “Immediately he received his sight and followed him on his way.”

Throughout the gospel of Mark, faith or the absence of faith determines what Jesus can do for anyone. In Capernaum, his hometown, he could do nothing because they had no faith. The gentile woman with the long-term bleeding condition, the woman whom Jesus suggested was a “dog”, was healed because of her faith. Every paralytic, blind person, sick child, or sinner who approached Jesus with faith was healed and forgiven.

What’s important to see in these various miracles is that, almost always, there’s more at issue than mere physical healing. Jesus is healing people in a deeper way. And when it comes to blindness, he helps them—and us—to see in a new way.

The Catholic columnist, Fr. Ron Rolheiser, illustrates this “seeing in a new way” through faith:

- Faith, he says, shifts our eyes from seeing through familiarity to seeing through wonder
- from seeing through fear and paranoia to seeing through conversion and hope
- from seeing through jealousy to seeing through admiration
- from seeing through anger to seeing through forgiveness and mercy
- from seeing through want and desire to seeing through gratitude

We do a whole lot of looking without really seeing much. Seeing implies more than having good eyesight. Our eyes can be wide open and we can be seeing very little.

Faith and love are the only faculties we have for perfect vision. Let's put on our "spiritual eyeglasses" to see beneath the surface of things.