

THE BLIND MAN ON THE ROAD TO JERICHO

We are accustomed to hearing read in the Liturgy the passage from the Epistle to the Hebrews which lists all the characters of the Old Covenant who endured great trials and great sufferings as a result of their faith in God and who knew that they themselves would not see the coming of the Messiah but prophetically were serving those who would be heirs of the Kingdom in a later age. Today's Gospel presents us with one of the human icons of the Kingdom of Heaven, whom they were content to serve. He is commended to us in the account as one of the people whom we are told to emulate in our own lives. He shares the company of the centurion, or the woman with the flow of blood who touched the hem of Christ's garment, or the Syro-Phoenician woman who bested Christ in an argument and demanded and obtained a healing from Him. All these people are set before us as living at least for a short time in the Kingdom of Heaven because they share an inner certainty about God and his dealings with mankind which culminates in a heroic act of faith and so breaks down the barrier between the fallen world and that of the Kingdom. The results are spectacular and defy the natural world or rather raise it to the level for which it was created.

Today's account is so short and simple. Jesus is about to pass by on the way to Jericho. The blind man hears about it from the crowd. He knows deep within that Jesus is capable of healing him though he has been blind from birth and nothing diverts him from his course. He begins to shout out almost desperately "Son of David, have mercy on me". Now this cry in itself reveals a lot about his inner life because not only does he connect Christ with the prophet David but also he does not shout out for healing but only for God's mercy. The reaction of the crowd is also interesting because firstly they do everything to quieten the man. What are they thinking when they tell him off for shouting and ask him to be silent? Is it that this kind of man can have nothing in common with a great teacher like Jesus or is it more simple that they want to see Jesus for themselves and extract some blessing for themselves – an act of selfishness. Rather ironically, it reminds me of the time I was waiting for communion in the Cathedral and a now departed lady jumped in front of me in the queue and delivered a well aimed elbow blow to my stomach and despatching me momentarily to the canvas for a compulsory count of six. But this blind man, unlike an Englishman, refuses to be deflected from his course and cries out even louder, "Son of David, have mercy on me". There is an inner conviction that this is his time, that nothing can stop him, this is the day of salvation. Jesus stops, asks him what he wants and heals him, commending his faith, which is the pattern of life in the Kingdom. He has shown himself to be a true son of Abraham, who believed God and whose faith was reckoned to him as righteousness. ** but like women at a Christmas sale*

Now this manner of life has been emphasised to us over the last few weeks in the Gospel readings from St Luke. We were told in ~~today's~~ reading on the ~~Old~~ Calendar of the dangers of thinking we can prepare materially for our lives without reference to God. We heard the story of the man who runs a successful farming business and builds larger barns for his possessions but has to forfeit his life that night. He has simply lost his spiritual orientation and no longer sees that all life is in the hands of God and is best lived by an act of daring (not irresponsibility) of placing one's life in the hands of God and knowing that he will provide miraculously.

But the blind man is not unlike us. We too in the life of faith, have the experience of knowing it is our time when God wants us to act, to take our life in our hands and jump with conviction. And some of us are given the vision to do that on a grand scale in what looks like an act of folly, in the same way as the disciples left what they were doing and followed Jesus immediately. Our friends will often think us foolish and irresponsible when they see us make such a radical act. The Gospel

tells us that this experience grows like a seed within us. We may try to extinguish it because we do not like what we hear or we may try to fan it to make it grow more quickly but ultimately it grows resolutely and irrepressibly within us till it bursts forth into bloom and becomes reality. "The call and the will of God are irrevocable," says the scriptures. This experience is also connected closely with an injunction of Christ to pray constantly and not lose hope. We are told about a woman who goes to a judge and asks for vindication against her enemies. The judge is a truly hard man who neither fears God nor man but because of her persistence and the sheer pressure of her requests gives in. We are told to be like that with God and ask for the Holy Spirit. Each of us is asked to consider what we should be praying urgently for in faith like the blind man in today's Gospel.

We come here to offer bread and wine to God for the life of the world and its salvation. We perform the sacrament of the Kingdom where faith is the light by which we walk. The angels and archangels have already been summoned to enter with us at the Little Entrance. Soon we shall ask Christ to be present in the bread and wine and enter us mystically. What else can be our prayer at this time but that of the blind man who in a similar way met Jesus on the road to Jericho, "Son of God, have mercy on us." In the light of God's presence with us and his response, "What do you want me to do for you?" may we each find a prayer that comes confidently, boldly and unselfishly from deep within our hearts and finds fulfilment because it comes from God himself. Amen.

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