

October 25, 2015 Bartimaeus Homily

In 1964 Marvel comics introduced a new superhero, Daredevil, to its faithful readers. What makes this superhero different from all the others is that he is disabled. As a result of a tragic accident, Matt Murdock (alias the Daredevil) is afflicted with blindness. While conducting research in his laboratory, he is blinded by a radioactive substance that falls from an oncoming vehicle. While he can no longer see, the radioactive exposure heightens his remaining senses beyond normal human ability and gives him extraordinary powers. The superhero is known by friend and foe alike as "the man without fear". In today's gospel (Mk.10:46-52), we encounter a disabled man named Bartimaeus. He, too, is blind. Socially isolated (He sat by the roadside begging), he depends on the mercy of others for what little relief they can provide him. But his misery has emboldened him to pray for a cure. In the form of a prayer, he cries out to Jesus: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me"(Mk.10:47). He is a man without fear. He senses that he has nothing to lose! Ironically the evangelist takes note that only a physically blind man can see clearly who Jesus is while those who have perfect vision such as the apostles remain in the dark about the mission of Jesus and his outreach to the socially disadvantaged. His obtuse disciples do not think that a blind beggar is worth their teacher's time. Undeterred, he persists in crying out to Jesus and is not disappointed for all his efforts. Bartimaeus's blindness turns out to be an unexpected blessing. His loss of eyesight has been the occasion for his encountering the healing power of God in Christ. No less remarkable is that the first thing in the world around him that he sees once his vision is restored is the face of Jesus. His day begins with him as a largely forgotten outcast begging for mercy on a roadside and ends with him walking along behind Jesus on the road to Jerusalem, the road to Calvary. Tellingly, he casts off his cloak (Mk.10:50), which symbolizes leaving behind his former way of life. It is the only instance of someone healed by Jesus who then becomes his follower!

In reflecting on this gospel, it seems that the Evangelist St. Mark makes a key point of emphasis. He wants us to recognize ourselves as this blind beggar. The first thing we have to admit is our own blindness!

An anecdote: Albert Speer was a German architect and a member of Adolf Hitler's inner circle. After the war he was convicted in a court of law of crimes against humanity and sentenced to do time in a maximum security prison. While in prison he wrote his memoir, which turned out to be a bestseller around the world. In the book he makes a startling confession. His words are unforgettable and chilling, concerning his leadership role as one of Hitler's close advisors and his known complicity in the deaths of millions of innocent people, he stated, "I had closed my eyes. My blindness was deliberate. I had to share the responsibility for what had happened". When he was finally released from prison, he was sixty years old, though, by all accounts, looked much older. One of his dearest friends told a Trappistine nun that his years in prison changed the one time confidante of the Chancellor of the third Reich. She said: He had beautiful eyes... eyes that had learned to see!"

The problem is that we think we can see... whereas in truth we can be blind!

A few examples: Do we close our eyes if we are presented with graphic ultrasound images on the pre-born child? Modern technology offers us a window to the womb. Do we turn away from disturbing images of violence, poverty and addictions? Our Lord had little patience with those who simply chose to be blind. In the account of the healing of the man born blind in the ninth chapter of John's gospel, Jesus offered withering criticism of his adversaries, the Pharisees. He scolded them for their blindness. "I have come into the world for judgment, so that those who do not see might see, and those who do see might become blind". Some of the Pharisees, who were with him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not also blind, are we? Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin, but now you are saying, 'We see', so your sin remains". (Jn.9: 39-41).

Let us recall with affection the man without fear in Mark's gospel, the blind man Bartimaeus. And like this remarkable person, let us pray that Our Lord heal our blindness, too.

Amen!