

**HOMILY 30th SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME 2021
THAT WE MAY SEE (WITH EYES OF FAITH)!**

Mk 10.46-52 Jer 31.7-9 Heb 4.1-6

Welcome now the 30th weekend of Ordinary Time, as we emerge from lockdown, with Melbourne holding the world record as the city with the longest lockdown. There remains the danger out there, with the ongoing reminder of the moral obligation of COVID double vaccination, so please get to it, if you haven't already.

There will be a requirement of proof of double vaccination, as well for those who wish to attend Mass here at St Therese's in person, after we open up from the weekend of 6th – 7th November.

I went along to our parish primary school this week, wearing my Melbourne Demons' cap, mask and tie (forgot the Max Gawn sox and scarf!), to welcome back Preps, then Grades 1&2, all clearly happy to be back with enthusiasm and smiles all around. It has been a long and difficult period of uncertainty and waiting for all. But we are making progress into more freedom, patiently, gradually and carefully. I'll continue to record Mass on-line after we open up, as well, for those who can't be here in person or who are still anxious about the circumstances.

Whenever I hear of Jesus encountering the blind or vice versa, in the Gospels, in my own mind, I go back to my secondary school days at CBC St Kilda (now St Mary's Co-Ed College), where we had a number of blind students as members of the community. Two of them remain good friends, brothers Stephen and Bill Jolley, along with their wives and children. I remember being impressed with their enthusiasm and bright outlook on life, learning, sport and space, with no negativity at all nor complaints about the limitations imposed by blindness. They could touch type, read braille, play the piano, and generally cope with the normal demands of life, with a little help along the way in negotiating the geography of the school, and then later, university. They were great role models for dealing with disability, but with the perspective of being differently abled, as they had an acute sense of hearing and also great imagination, as well adjusted to their situation as anyone could be.

One Boxing Day in the mid-1970's, Bill and I were outside a packed MCG (for the England vs Australia Cricket Test), when the roar went up before we got in as Lillee bowled Amiss yet again, so we missed that one. When we finally got into the old Southern Stand, it was standing room only, except for a small section near the boundary line. And so we headed for it, only to find that I couldn't see much at all of the action, as the sight screen was directly in front of us. Bill was quite happy, because he could hear some of the action from the field, being so close, while I was the one who was frustrated! It woke me up to realize what we take for granted when sighted.

At least, the sight screen was moved later in the day as the sun moved across the sky, and I got a better view! We used to go to the football on a Saturday afternoon back then too, when Melbourne played Essendon or Hawthorn, whom each supported, with more success than I, until a few weeks ago! As I often say, it would be boring if we all went for the same team and at least someone is happy some of the time!!

Now, today's Gospel got me thinking about how many times Jesus encountered blind persons on his itinerant mission path, so I asked Doctor Google, which came up with an extraordinary number of hits! And then there's Wikipedia, with its own detailed entry. I like its reference to Timaeus as one who presents ancient Greek Plato's "*most important cosmological and theological treatise, involving sight as the foundation of knowledge*"! That's probably a stretch, but an interesting one to me.

Each of the 4 Gospels has an account or two, with varying details, but we'll stick with our friend Bartimaeus today. The headings range from "**9 Inspirational Lessons from a Blind Man, 7 Lessons to learn from blind Bartimaeus, Blind Bartimaeus Activities, Sunday School Lesson, Preschool Activities, Blind Bartimaeus Games, Complete Lesson Set**", so this little story gets plenty of attention at all levels. One summary says: "*Blind Bartimaeus shows us we need Jesus, the importance of Godly friends, reminds us of our worth, only God can fill us, God fills the empty places and like the blind beggar, we need to throw off our coats*", as we see Jesus showing us the way to go.

In fact, I almost don't need to have prepared this homily, as I could have just put up a link for Google to provide the reflections!! Nevertheless, I'll try with a few of my own thoughts, helped with insights from the usual scripture scholarly suspects (Brendan Byrne SJ, Frank Moloney SDB and Claude Mostowik MSC).

My thought about Jericho is that there is some significance here in Jesus encountering Bartimaeus here, outside what archaeologists tell us, is the oldest continually inhabited city in the world, for 11,000 years. You might recall the song about Joshua fighting the Battle of Jericho and the walls coming tumbling down, but human occupation has endured, now a Palestinian village on the West Bank, home now to some 20,000 inhabitants. It might be taken as a symbol of humanity in its diversity, with Bartimaeus emerging from the darkness at the side of the path, seeking enlightenment and restoration of his sight from Jesus.

Good old Bartimaeus pops up today, right at the end of the section in Mark's Gospel, where Jesus has forecast his passion and death 3 times, to the deaf ears of the apostles, as they continue to think of themselves and their hoped for places of honour in the Kingdom of which Jesus speaks. Remember how last week James and John were still jockeying or lobbying Jesus for prime positions of comfort, prestige and power, when he was speaking in clear terms about suffering and death, with the symbolism of the Cross to the forefront. They just don't want to know about the tough stuff! Yet, this is life for all of us, facing our faults, frailty, mortality and need for forgiving and forgiveness. Bart(imaeus not Simpson!) can be seen as a reminder of our need to look further into who Jesus is for us, and to follow him on the unpredictable, but wonderful, journey of life.

Frank Moloney suggests: *"Bartimaeus provides us all with a model of discipleship: recognize our need, shed all pretensions of power and glory, be filled with the goodness which only Jesus can give, and then follow him down his way to the resurrection through the Cross."*

Brendan Byrne reminds us that Jesus' journey here began with his healing of the blind person at Bethsaida in Galilee, and now concludes with Bartimaeus regaining his sight, so that Mark's intention could have been *"to make the physical blindness of the two men Jesus heals a symbol of the spiritual blindness of the disciples... What he (Bartimaeus) does have is an acute sense of his own need and a deep reserve of faith, which has driven him to break through the barrier so vigorously to get access to Jesus... to really follow Jesus with understanding of what his mission is truly about... Bartimaeus, the blind beggar becomes, at this climactic stage of Jesus' journey, a model of discipleship and faith."*

Initially discouraged by those around Jesus from coming forward, Bartimaeus persists with determination and energy to encounter Jesus, who happily insists on connecting with him and offering healing and insight, in response to his need and his faith in Jesus. And so it is for you and me, as we move forward in faith.

john hannon

24th October 2021