



Father Dominic Lenk
Homily, Thirtieth Ordinary Sunday
Year B, 2009
Saint Anselms

HOMILY — THIRTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME — YEAR B

It was a day like most any other day, there at the city gate of Jericho. This gate, which opened on the road that led to Jerusalem, had been a silent witness to the comings and goings of many throughout the ages, beginning from the time the wall had been rebuilt after Joshua and his troops had brought the previous wall tumbling down. Though a slight breeze stirred, it was not enough to relieve the heat from the noonday sun high overhead.

Sitting just outside the gate sat a certain beggar. He was just one of many beggars who gathered there hoping for some relief in their pitiful lives. No one could remember how long he had been there. But day-after-day, year-after-year there sat poor, old, blind Bartimaeus begging for his daily bread.

Most people on entering or leaving the city paid little attention to him or the other beggars as they cried out for mercy. Though some did throw a coin or two, not so much out of kindness or pity, but more so to relieve their own consciences.

For that rare person who did stop and take time to talk with Bartimaeus, they soon realized that he was a wealth of information. Word had spread quickly among those traveling the road between Jerusalem and Jericho that if you wanted to know the latest Jericho gossip, you must go talk with blind Bartimaeus. For even though he was blind, his hearing was quite keen.

Bartimaeus looked forward to these rare conversations with those who walked passed the place where he sat. For it was through these conversations that he learned much about the world in which he lived but could not see. In recent months he had heard about an itinerant rabbi going from place to place preaching a message of love and compassion unlike any rabbi before him. But Bartimaeus was also intrigued by this rabbi's gift of granting mercy and healing to those in need.

And so, Bartimaeus sought to learn all he could about this rabbi who, he soon discovered, was named Jesus. Visitors to Jericho who counted on gaining information from Bartimaeus quickly found that they were answering his questions.

"Where is Jesus now? Did he really raise that young girl to life? What do you think he means he says, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit'? Do you think that Jesus will come to Jericho someday? I wonder if he would heal me?"

And though this particular day started out like any other day for poor, old, blind Bartimaeus, he soon found it to be a most extraordinary day. He couldn't quite believe it at first, but word had spread that Jesus was in Jericho and was headed toward Jerusalem. As the crowd began to pass by him, he heard a voice proclaiming that the Kingdom of God was at hand and "Blessed are the poor in spirit."



SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



“Is it really Him?” Bartimaeus thought to himself, “It must be Jesus!” And before he was aware of what he was doing, he was crying out at the top of his voice, “Jesus, son of David, have pity on me.”

Those around Bartimaeus rebuked him saying, “Be quiet, old man, Jesus doesn’t have time for you.” But he kept calling out all the more, “Son of David, have pity on me.”

Suddenly the crowd stopped moving. They grew silent. “What’s going on?” Bartimaeus asked himself. Then, someone took him by the arm and helped him to get to his feet, saying, “Take courage; get up, Jesus is calling you.”

With the help of the stranger by his side, Bartimaeus moved on trembling limbs to Jesus, not quite sure what was about to happen but hopeful that maybe, just maybe this was the day he had longed for.

Jesus gently spoke to him, “My son, what do you want me to do for you?” With hope overcoming fear, he replied, “Master, I want to see.”

Suddenly, as if a veil had been lifted, the eyes of Bartimaeus were looking into the eyes of Love Incarnate. He recalled the words of the Prophet Jeremiah that he had learned in his youth, “Thus says the LORD: Shout with joy for Jacob, . . . The LORD has delivered his people, . . . with the blind . . . in their midst, . . . they shall return as an immense throng. They departed in tears, but I will console them and guide them; I will lead them to brooks of water, on a level road, so that none shall stumble.”

Each day we take our place outside the gates of a city, just as Bartimaeus did. Except it is not the earthly city of Jericho. Rather, it is the heavenly city of the new Jerusalem.

Each day we beg for mercy from those passing by on their way into this Holy City. For in our weakness we know we cannot enter by our own merit. For we, like Bartimaeus, are blind. Except our blindness is not due to any physical defect, our blindness is due to sin.

Those entering this Holy City are not mere travelers. They are the holy company of the Saints. Yet, unlike the travelers on the road to Jericho who avert their eyes to poor beggars, the Saints are eager to help us overcome our human weakness. For the alms that they give are the examples of their holy lives, encouraging us to live as they lived.

When the Saints hear us cry out, “Jesus, son of David, have pity on me,” they do not rebuke us, telling us to be silent or to go away. No, they immediately take us by the hand saying to us, “Take courage; get up, Jesus is calling you.”

May the grace freely offered to us by our Lord to help us overcome our human weakness, strengthen the faith that we profess by giving us the hope to overcome our fears, so that — like Bartimaeus — our eyes may be found looking into the eyes of Love Incarnate both now and forever.