

## Reflection for the 30<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Year

FIRST READING: Jeremiah 31:7-9

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah:

Thus says the LORD: Shout with joy for Jacob, exult at the head of the nations; proclaim your praise and say: The LORD has delivered his people, the remnant of Israel. Behold, I will bring them back from the land of the north; I will gather them from the ends of the world, with the blind and the lame in their midst, the mothers and those with child; 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. For I am a father to Israel, Ephraim is my first-born.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 126:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6

***The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.***

When the LORD brought back the captives of Zion, we were like men dreaming. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with rejoicing.

***The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.***

Then they said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them." The LORD has done great things for us; we are glad indeed.

***The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.***

Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like the torrents in the southern desert. Those that sow in tears shall reap rejoicing.

***The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.***

Although they go forth weeping, carrying the seed to be sown, They shall come back rejoicing, carrying their sheaves.

***The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.***

SECOND READING: Hebrews 5:1-6

A reading from the Letter to the Hebrews:

Brothers and sisters: Every high priest is taken from among men and made their representative before God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He is able to deal patiently with the ignorant and erring, for he himself is beset by weakness and so, for this reason, must make sin offerings for himself as well as for the people. No one takes this honor upon himself but only when called by God, just as Aaron was. In the same way, it was not Christ who glorified himself in becoming high priest, but rather the one who said to him: *You are my son: this day I have begotten you*; just as he says in another place: *You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek*.

The word of the Lord.

GOSPEL: Mark 10:46-52

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark:

As Jesus was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a sizable crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind man, the son of Timaeus, sat by the roadside begging. On hearing that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, son of David, have pity on me." And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he kept calling out all the more, "Son of David, have pity on me." Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." So they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take courage; get up, Jesus is calling you." He threw aside his cloak, sprang up, and came to Jesus. Jesus said to him in reply, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man replied to him, "Master, I want to see." Jesus told him, "Go your way; your faith has saved you." Immediately he received his sight and followed him on the way.

The Gospel of the Lord.

### **Reflection for the 30<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Year**

Jeremiah wrote this hopeful passage for the Jewish people in Diaspora. The Babylonian Exile of the kingdom of Judah lasted about seventy years. Eventually Babylon was overthrown by the rise of the Persians. Just a bit of ancient history as it relates to contemporary geography; Babylon was in Iraq and Persia is now called Iran. The Oriental Institute, in Chicago's Hyde Park near the University of Chicago, has two fine galleries for these two mighty and ancient peoples. They also have a fine website for virtual viewing. The exiles may or may not have longed to go home to the Promised Land. In terms of history, more Jews remained in Diaspora, as they do today, than returned to Israel. Not everyone is interested in living in a desert. The famed Ten Lost Tribes were never really lost; they just never returned to their homeland. Exile had ended, not Diaspora.

Religious people may take events of history or their own personal life and give them divine significance. In Jeremiah's time, the destruction of the Jewish homeland and temple and the exile of the people into Diaspora were interpreted as God's punishment for the people's infidelity to the Covenant and for sin. The people also interpreted the return of the remnant to Judah and act of forgiveness and mercy by God. This interpretation has always seemed to me as dysfunctional. Babylon may have been the agent of destruction, death and enslavement, by the will of God. Persia was the agent of restoration; also by God's will. The hand of God may smite or heal; how can God's people know the difference? Perhaps there's another approach.

I prefer another interpretation. War is of human origin. The destructions of cities and dispersion of refugees, though cruel, is caused by human agents. God's people, as well as refugees today, take God with them. God's presence in our lives is a constant. God is always nearest to the broken hearted and especially sinners for that's when we need God the most. I have always been moved, deeply, by the poetic prayer "Footprints." It only feels like God is gone during those times. Fortunately, we live by faith and not our feelings. We get through

those experiences because, as God relates at the punch-line of the prayer, “There’s only one set of footprints because that’s when I carried you.” This vision of God’s presence is healthier for God never leaves us alone.

Jeremiah went out of his way to include pregnant mothers, children, the blind and lame. These are both the neediest of people and also those who had the least rank in society. God loves them as their father. This is an intimate group that Jeremiah has envisioned. This immense throng of people lives and moves in God’s presence and by God’s guidance. Holiness is not far away in the homeland but in the midst of God’s people who need it. This is true for the remnant that returns and the many that remain in Diaspora.

I like to think that this way of knowing God, now and in our midst, is healthier and more in keeping with the Good News of the gospel. God’s infinite, eternal and unconditional love is at the heart of this vision. With politics, prejudice and pandemic raging around us, we need the strength of God’s love so much. God first loves us so we can love back. God forgives us so we, in turn, can forgive others. God never leaves us in times of trouble. Even though we await the fulfillment of God’s Kingdom, the seeds of it are now as Jesus lives with, through, in and among us.

Melchizedek was an ancient pagan priest-king who blessed Abraham on his journeys in the book of Genesis. He presented bread and wine to God in the process. Of his origin, the narration is silent. How did he become high-priest? It is a mystery; he appeared on the scene with no introduction. His sole purpose, by the grace of God, was to give a blessing to Abraham. We read the silence of the text as God’s providence. I was ordained a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek. The mystery remains today.

Aaron was Moses’ brother. How did he get to be a priest? He was the source of the Jewish priesthood. The word for priest in Hebrew is Kohen. His descendants are those with the name Cohen. Moses was the true priest as well as prophet and king. God chose him by name from the Burning Bush. Aaron was first introduced as Moses’ assistant. God chose him for that role because, unfortunately, Moses was a poor speaker. Aaron was Moses’ spokesman. This is a backdoor into the priesthood, but a door none the less. God works in mysterious ways.

It has never been crystal clear how people get to be priests. There are so many variables. Many guys with whom I studied while in the seminary dropped out. Many of those with whom I was ordained have left the priesthood. Some of those who dropped out would have made fine priests. Those who quit were good, fine priests. I will say this too; because of our baptism, we are all chosen as priests. At baptism we are anointed priest, prophet and king. It is out of the priesthood of the baptized that my ordained priesthood has come. There is mystery in this too.

As Christians, the mystery of priesthood is intimately linked to Jesus death and resurrection. Jesus is the Messiah, anointed priest, prophet and king like Moses. Jesus is also linked to another, David. David remained God’s beloved and is the icon for the ideal king. He, too, was anointed priest, prophet and king. Jesus died as the sacrifice that redeemed us from our sins and rose from the dead to give us the promise of eternal life. Jesus returned to the Father and sent the Spirit to establish his Church, of which we and all believers are members. We await Jesus return to fulfill the promise of God’s Kingdom.

A priest offers sacrifice for sin. A prophet preaches God's Word. A king rules a kingdom. We are believers whom God has saved. We are sinners who seek God's forgiveness. We are seekers who listen for God's Word. We serve one another as God's people as we strive for God's Kingdom. At the heart of all we do and say, we reflect Jesus to a waiting world. Sometimes we need to remember what our baptism has begun.

Mark is often subtle in his narrative. He's the only evangelist who names a blind man. His name, Bartimaeus means the son of honor. According to the ancient Jewish tradition, his father would be named Honor (in Aramaic or Greek, Timaeus). In English he would be called Junior. I like this bit of trivia. The Son of Honor gave honor to the Son of David. In calling Jesus by that title, Bartimaeus acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah thus expressing his faith. The context of this story comes as Jesus has been teaching the disciples of his mission to die and rise again. The disciples have had a tough time accepting the mission. Peter tried to talk Jesus out of it.

Bartimaeus asked Jesus something specific, "Master, I want to see!" He didn't ask for new glasses or to gain his sight. Did he want to see with eyes of faith? Was Jesus the first person Bartimaeus would see in faith? Like I said Mark is subtle. On his journey to Jesus, the disciples wanted to get rid of him. Maybe he seemed like trouble. Remember, he was blind and needed someone to guide him. Jesus didn't seek out Bartimaeus either. Bartimaeus had to make his own way to Jesus. Jesus beckoned him but offered just his call. The same disciples who wanted to stifle his cries were the ones to convey Jesus invitation. His faith saved him, as Jesus said acknowledging the validity of Bartimaeus' seeking. Bartimaeus then became Jesus' disciple.

Bartimaeus symbolizes a believer's journey to Jesus. He entered the story crying out, "Son of David, have pity on me!" As David had been Israel's ideal king, most Jews could be called a son or daughter of David. This honors the ancient traditions of a people of faith. However, Mark's narrative is not just about the healing of a blind man. This story always reminds me of the line from the old hymn, "Amazing Grace." "Amazing grace (how sweet the sound)! That saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see." This is what has happened to Bartimaeus. What is in store for us?

The readings today speak of promise through the gift of faith. What does God do? The Jewish people had the promise to know God's abiding presence where they lived and when they needed God the most. They believed and God responded. Bartimaeus believed and saw through eyes of faith and followed Jesus. What of us? We believe. What is our promise?

May we always find our way to Jesus who gives us all we need.

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