

## Quinquagesima

I take as my text today from St. Luke's Gospel:

*And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken.*

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable unto Thee, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer.*

In today's Gospel from St. Luke, we find our Lord with his face set toward Jerusalem where he is to make his final appeal to God's people, an appeal that will be met with rejection.

Then, rejected as the Messiah, Jesus is to face the ordeal we call his *Passion*.

It is not without courage that Jesus set out on this last journey, a journey that was to end in his **Crucifixion**. He knew the pain and agony that awaited. It was the path he had chosen in order to fulfill the promise of the Law and the Prophets for the redemption of mankind, indeed the salvation of all Creation.

Whatever the sacrifice, whatever the cost, in perfect obedience to his Father's will and purpose, Jesus accepted the inevitable cup of suffering and humiliation and set out toward Jerusalem.

Though time and again, Jesus had told the twelve of what was to come, his **Apostles** still failed to fully grasp what he was telling them. Even when the time came and Jesus was hanging on the **Cross**, the **Apostles** were shocked and shattered at what transpired.

Though Jesus had warned over and over them of what was to come, they still continued to be obsessed with the idea of a conquering king who would use his power in the end to overcome his enemies, blind to the truth that our Lord had given them.

Perhaps, this is why St. Luke used the words, *and this saying was hid from them* — his **Apostles** could not, would not see the truth

Perhaps, also, this is why St. Luke tied the story of the blind man so closely to the warning of what was to come.

If we put ourselves into the context of *Biblical Times*, we would be able to see the pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem traveling in groups. Those along the way, in the towns and villages who could not make the journey, would line the roadways to watch the travelers as they journeyed.

It was quite common for a teacher or rabbi to use such a trip, any trip, to teach, and his students would group around him as he walked along. Such was the case with Jesus and his followers. They would be grouped around him as they walked, keeping as close as possible to be able to hear his every word.

Naturally, when a disruption, such as the blind man crying out, would occur, members of the group would try to put an end to whatever was interfering with their being able to hear their teacher.

But, in this situation, the disciples had met their match: the more they tried to keep the man quiet, the louder and more persistent he became. St. Mark gives him a name: **Bartimaeus**.

**Bartimaeus** most likely had joined those along the roadside as an opportunity for begging. Without doubt, being blind, he was poor as well.

With Jesus and his group approaching, the din would have increased, especially with those along the roadside proclaiming to one another that a notable personage was passing by. Indeed, by this time, Jesus had acquired many **Disciples** as well as those who were his **Apostles**, thus, he was accompanied by a rather large entourage as they walked with him straining to hear him speak.

**Bartimaeus** was told by those around him that it was the prophet of Nazareth passing by, the **One** known for his ability to heal the sick and lame. The blind man seized on the opportunity and shouted out:

*Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me.*

His cries were described by Luke first as *shouts* and then as an almost animalistic cry or emotional scream. Efforts to quiet him down were futile. So, Jesus stopped and addressed him, saying:

*What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?*

And the blind man answered:

*Lord, that I may receive my sight.*

To which Jesus responded:

*Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee.*

Here, in his response to the anguished **Bartimaeus**, was another demonstration of his love and compassion of Jesus, his willingness to respond to our needs when we approach him from the depths of our hearts.

But what is the connection between the blindness of the **Apostles** and the blindness of **Bartimaeus**?

**Bartimaeus**, of course, was suffering from *literal blindness* — he was physically blind.

The **Apostles** were suffering from *spiritual blindness* in that they were fixated on the prophecies of the *Messiah's Glory* and could not see those prophecies which spoke of his suffering.

Putting this incident into context, we may well say that St. Luke was demonstrating to us the difference between *spiritual blindness* and *literal blindness*.

Indeed, St. Luke brings into focus a deeper understanding of sight — that it can be *spiritual* as well as *physical*, and, in this instance, sight as meaning the *faith that saves*.

When our eyes are opened spiritually, it brings to us spiritual discernment and insight. And while the *faith that saves* may bring with it physical healing, it is the healing of our souls that leads to the ultimate victory.

As for the **Apostles**, they were blinded by earthly expectations and unprepared for what would transpire in Jerusalem even though forewarned by our Lord; they were like the rest of the Jews who expected a glorious and victorious Messiah, failing to note the prophecies of the *suffering servant*.

Are we like that in our spiritual lives? Do we see only the glory of salvation but are blind to the temptations of the world? So blinded by worldliness that we are prevented from seeing that our salvation depends on us, that we must act in order to attain to eternal life?

**Bartimaeus** did not receive his sight by whimpering: he cried out to Jesus from the depths of his soul.

The **Apostles** would come to face many challenges, but, with their *spiritual sight* restored through an abiding faith deep within their souls, they could and did stand up with courage for what had been revealed to them by our Lord.

So, what about us?

Can we be like **Bartimaeus**? Do we cry out from the depths of our souls to our Lord to open our spiritual eyes?

**Lent** is a solemn time in our yearly cycle of worship, a time when we look inward to examine ourselves and refocus ourselves **spiritually**.

What are we looking for in this self-examination? It should not be just our sins, our failings, our unworthiness; we must look deeper, look into our inner being — our heart, our soul, our mind where only we and God can see.

Are our hearts filled with love? are we compassionate? are we giving? are our thoughts Godward? are we blind to the beauty and the power of God's **Love**?

Where we fall short, what are we doing about it?

**Bartimaeus** had an answer: cry out from the depths of your souls; cry out that your spiritual eyes may be opened to the saving **Faith** that comes through Jesus Christ.

God offers us his **Love** and **Grace** if we will just open our spiritual eyes to see and take — it is ours.

That his **Love** and **Grace** abounds and surrounds us becomes a reality only if we open our spiritual eyes to gaze upon it.

We see it in the beauty of God's **Creation**: all of his **Creation**. We see it in the worship of the **Church**. We behold it dearly when we receive the **Body and Blood of Christ** in the bread and wine.

And it is most clearly revealed when we look upon the **Cross**, for there our Lord poured out his love for us with his **Blood**.

If the **Apostles**, those closest to Jesus, were so blinded, what **hope** is there for us?

Indeed, there is **hope** — is one of the defining forces of our **Faith**.

**Hope** — a compound emotion consisting of both desire and expectation. In Christ Jesus that **hope** is fulfilled, our eyes opened, our sight restored.

We may recall, St. Paul on the road to Damascus was struck blind *physically* so that when the scales fell from his eyes he would have *spiritual sight*; he received that same *spiritual sight* which had been restored to the **Apostles** earlier by virtue of their **Faith** and the infusion of the **Holy Spirit** at **Pentecost**.

Now, **Lent** is upon us, a solemn period in the **Church** for self-examination, especially a time to examine our *spiritual sight*, that the scales may fall from our eyes so that we may see clearly and focus on our Lord, for in him is the fulfillment of our expectation for eternal life.