

30th Sunday (B)

25th October 2015

'Seeing the Light'

Jer 31: gathering in the blind and the lame Ps 125: *Deliver us, O Lord, from our bondage*
Heb 5: Christ the high priest
Mk 10: 46–52: *his sight returned and he followed Him along the road*

If you think about it, the sun is needed for everything ... plants, winds, animals. Without the heat and light of the sun to drive the world's ecosystem there would be no life, no fuel, no energy, no weather. But with the energy provided by the sun the earth teems with living things, with colour and greenery, with animals from bacteria to blue whales, and with mankind in all his various activities. The sun drives all the natural life on earth ... no wonder ancient pagans worshipped the sun as if it were a god. Life on earth would be impossible without the sun — inhospitably cold and black.

Now the blind beggar, Bartimaeus, is in darkness himself — he can't see the sun or the beauty of its effects. Yet he is not totally unaware of it: he can sense it's presence through its other effects ... he can hear the rush and feel the brush of the wind; feel the warmth of the sun on his skin; but this is not enough, he still wants to have the more basic experience ... he wants to see the sun and the light! The miracle, when Jesus heals his sight is in part a metaphor — because when Bartimaeus can see again, he doesn't just go off on his way, he gets up and follows Jesus.

His faith has saved him: he doesn't just see in Jesus a miracle-worker, but also someone who lets him see spiritually too. He can see the sun again, but more importantly He can also see the Son of God: he sees Jesus for who He is.

Just like the earth would have no natural life if it weren't for the sun — it would be dead and quiet and lifeless — so are we dead and lifeless in our souls without the Son of God. God looks after nature through the evolution of the universe by providing material comfort in water and sunshine; and that's sufficient for buttercups and bacteria and baboons and buffalo ... the earthly environment completely fulfils them. They need nothing more than the earth gives them, because they are made only of matter, and the matter which surrounds them is enough. They have sunshine and food and water and the company of their own kind — and they are happy.

But Bartimaeus — and the rest of us — are very different from buttercups and baboons: we are not satisfied with what the earth provides. We could eat and drink and sunbathe as much as we want, and still we would never be fully happy. We can even have the company of other people all day every day, and still not be fulfilled, because mankind is not made only of matter. Alone in the known universe, mankind is matter and spirit — and

therefore our soul must be nurtured just as much as our body. The natural environment is not enough for us — our environment is God, because only God can satisfy the deepest longings of the human heart. It is God who feeds our soul; God's grace is the 'sunshine of the soul,' and if we are blind to the working of God in our lives, then we are as unhappy as Bartimaeus.

Of course, everyone senses some indications of the spiritual world — the power of loving and being loved; exhilaration at beautiful sights or sounds; the innate need to pray especially when we are in difficulty; the natural sense that there is some divine purpose for the world. But if we stop at these then we are still as blind as Bartimaeus, who hears and feels the effects of the sun, but doesn't for a moment see it. We want to have the real thing, like he wanted to see the sunlight: we don't want only to feel the spiritual warmth of God as it reflects off man's spiritual nature, we want to see the source of that spiritual light, the Son of God Himself. Especially since — as for Bartimaeus — the Son of God is walking right in front of us! He is with us day by day in and through the Church, the Sacraments, the Scriptures. "Lord, that we may see," we cry out to Jesus: "Open our eyes, Lord, to the light which you shed on

man's existence, and then we shall be satisfied." If we do not stop and let Jesus open our eyes, then we stumble along through life not knowing what feelings to follow; but if we just let Him light up our lives and rekindle the flame of our baptism candle, then we see clearly. Life is not a groping in the gloom; it is a long, but well-lit walk along the Way of Jesus, "the light of the world."

A Prayer for Sight

Origen (185-253)

May the Lord Jesus touch our eyes,
as he did those of the blind.

Then we shall begin to see in visible things
those which are invisible.

May He open our eyes to gaze not on present realities,
but on the blessings to come.

May he open the eyes of our heart to contemplate God
in Spirit,

Through Jesus Christ the Lord,
to whom belong power and glory
through all eternity. Amen.