30 B 2024

Brothers and Sisters of Penance, Greetings! To appreciate today’s Gospel in which Jesus heals the blind beggar Bartimaeus, we should remember last Sunday’s Gospel in which Jesus has a conversation with James and John. Jesus asks the exact same question: *“What do you want Me to do for you?”* But the answers in the two situations are very different.

James and John ask that they sit at Jesus’ right and left when He comes into His glory. Bartimaeus asks, *“Master, I want to see.”* James and John ask for power and glory. Bartimaeus asks for sight and understanding. Jesus tells the brothers that He cannot grant their request, but Jesus immediately responds to Bartimaeus, and the beggar receives his sight.

Today’s Gospel makes clear that sight is more important than glory, that understanding is more desired than power. Like James and John, we are attracted to power because power makes things happen, to get things done. Before we ask Jesus for the power to do things, we first ask for the gift of sight.

We look at the partisan divisions that darken the political landscape, the way personal attacks takes the place for public discourse, to see the anger and prejudice that fuel the political divide. We appeal for civility and honesty. We look at the scandal of clerical sexual abuse in the Church, to see weakness and sinfulness on display. It’s only when we see and understand the brokenness of our political and church systems that we will be able to rebuild and reform. Our voices must echo Franciscan sentiments of courtesy, gentleness, fraternity, instruments of peace.

The request that Bartimaeus voices—“Master, I want to see”—is one that all would be disciples of Jesus have to make over and over again, and to imitate Jesus in understand the human predicament in which we find ourselves. In this area we all lack a capacity to “see” which only divine power—God’s grace—can remedy. To put mercy in action.

The Epistle to the Hebrews introduces us to Jesus as High Priest, compassionate and merciful. Because Jesus is human, He can truly sympathize with human weakness. His divine status and appointment can bring our needs efficaciously before the Father.

We remember that Jesus is on journey to Jerusalem, knowing that He will face rejection and death. He has been speaking about His coming sacrifice, and the need to give everything for the mission. He also calls the disciples to do the same. Bartimaeus not only gained his sight, he chose to follow Jesus. With faith and courage he leaves everything behind. With trust and dedication, may we leave behind what holds us back, and have the faith to follow Jesus.

