

## THIRTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – October 24, 2021

Jeremiah 31:7-9; Psalm 126; Hebrews 5:1-6; Mark 10:46-52

There's a little prayer that we can use for almost any occasion, or even for no occasion, called "The Jesus Prayer." It's easy to remember, it's short, and it tells the truth. It goes like this: *"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner."* According to numerous Church Fathers, the Jesus Prayer is "essential" to our spiritual growth. It proclaims our faith and humbles us by asking mercy for our sinfulness. The Jesus Prayer is thought to be as old as the Church itself.

It could be that "The Jesus Prayer" has its roots in this passage that we just heard from the Gospel of Mark. Bartimaeus, the blind beggar, calls to Jesus as he and his disciples are walking by after leaving the city of Jericho: "Jesus, son of David, have pity (or mercy) on me." Bartimaeus has evidently heard enough about Jesus—this miracle worker—to stir up his faith. And he apparently has heard more than just Jesus being a miracle worker, because he calls him "Son of David." The title "Son of David" can simply mean a member of the royal family, a descendent of King David, but more specifically it probably refers to Jesus' messianic identity, because "Son of David" was one of the titles that would be used for the Messiah, the long-awaited King of Israel. What is interesting is that the son of David who succeeded him as king of Israel was Solomon, who was also called the "Son of God" (see 2 Samuel 7:14).

So Bartimaeus "sees" something in Jesus that the others who are travelling with him do not. Because when Bartimaeus calls out to Jesus, "many of them rebuked him, telling him to be silent." Maybe they didn't want him disturbing the peace and interrupting their own time with Jesus. Maybe they felt embarrassed by this blind beggar trying to grab some attention, possibly intruding on their agenda.

Isn't this something we see a lot of? How many times have we tried to express our faith in a public way and people try to silence us? It can happen in a more private setting where friends or family might be embarrassed by our praying aloud or spontaneously, simply by giving thanks or praise to God. "Oh, there he goes again!" But we are also seeing this in a much more public way where we find it increasingly difficult to be able to express our faith and our beliefs. Our culture and society are pushing God and faith in Him out of the way, and instead replacing Him with other gods. I've mentioned this before: our civil authorities can make almost anything legal, and they can make almost anything illegal, but they cannot change the truth.

But what does Bartimaeus do? He cried out all the more, "Son of David, have pity on me." He's persistent; he doesn't stop. He continues to ask Jesus for the mercy he desires, for the healing he longs for. I would suggest to you that we do the same in our prayer, both in private and public. Too often we feel as if we are being ignored or not being heard in our pleas, either by our civil authorities, or even by God, so we stop asking; we stop praying. We become weary and don't feel like it's worth the effort.

So what happens? Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." This is when the crowd finally comes to the support of Bartimaeus and says to him, "Take courage: get up, Jesus is calling you." Hasn't he already been showing courage by crying out when everyone else is telling him to be quiet, when it seems as if no one else is listening?

But Jesus hears our cries from the very beginning; so why does it seem like he waits to call us to him? He wants us to plead with him, to persist in our calling out to him. This is also why Jesus asks Bartimaeus: "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus already knows what he wants, and also what he needs. So why does he ask the question? Because he wants Bartimaeus to make his petition explicit. It's one of the ways that Jesus teaches. He wants us to respond to his call. He wants us to be engaged in whatever healing or prayer or discipleship he's calling us to. He always demands that we make a decision, that we be engaged, and that we ask him. And he wants *us* to be convinced that we need *him*.

And if we give up calling on Jesus, then we will fall right into the trap that the world wants us to, and that is to convince ourselves that we don't need to pray, that we don't need God, and that we can take care of things ourselves. We need to imitate Bartimaeus. Even if God does not immediately give us what we ask, even if many people try to silence us and put us off our prayers, we need to still go on praying.

Because of his persistence, because of his faith, and because he requests to Jesus directly, "Master, I want to see," Jesus heals him and says, "Go your way." But Bartimaeus doesn't leave. Mark tells us that he followed him on the way. Now on one level that could mean that he simply followed Jesus on the road toward Jerusalem with the other disciples. And it's likely that he did.

But on a deeper level it possibly means something much more important. Bartimaeus follows Jesus. He becomes a disciple of Jesus. "The Way" was one of the earliest names for the church that we find in the Book of Acts. In the Book of Acts it speaks about the Jerusalem authorities persecuting those who belong to "the Way."

So to follow Jesus on the way is to realize that we're all called out of our bondage—to sin, to spiritual blindness—and called to journey on the way of discipleship. It's the way of following the Lord. It's having our eyes opened so we can see Jesus and follow him. So God opened the eyes of this man so he can now become a disciple, a follower of Jesus.

He does the same for us. We just need to call out to Him. And call out to Him. And call out to Him. Always and everywhere. May we never fail to recognize our need for His grace and mercy, to strengthen our faith and trust in Him that we may seek His presence daily and listen to His word with readiness to follow Him.

*"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner."*