

Homily
October 27, 2024
30th Sunday in Ordinary Time
26:05 – 42:49

Jeremiah Chapter 31 – a proclamation of hope by the reluctant prophet, by the one beset by so many trials, persecutions, thrown into an empty, muddy cistern, threatened with death constantly because he kept proclaiming what God wanted him to proclaim.

But by Chapter 31, having done that, it is time for him to proclaim hope to the people of Jerusalem, who were actually under siege. They had seen the people of the Northern Kingdom carried off years before. They had seen their own leaders carried off to Babylon. And now they were facing exile.

And what we heard today, just a short part of the chapter, is the promise that God was going to bring them back -North Kingdom, South Kingdom. But even more in this passage, the emphasis is on the blind, the lame, mothers and those with child. That is, the outcast, the marginal, the ones that are often left behind because they are defenseless and can be a burden on the larger group. But no. They are included in the hope and In God's plan to bring them home.

They didn't earn it. They didn't (if you will) deserve it, in one sense. But it was out of God's love that this was going to happen. They were his people. He was going to be there for them.

(To sister – Hello! They brought you along this time. I've known her for many years. She used to help take care of my mother. – All right. Let me get back to where I was.)

Later in Jeremiah Chapter 31 there is the promise that God is going to renew his Covenant with the people. Again, it is a gift. They didn't earn it. They didn't deserve it. But out of love he's not going to let them go.

He's going to renew the Covenant, just as we will hear in another place in Ezekiel, how God renews the Covenant for these same folks. God knows his people. He values them. Even as we have heard today – the marginal, the least, the most vulnerable.

Which takes us to the Gospel passage, where it seems this sizable crowd journeying with Jesus has totally forgotten what Jeremiah said. That the Covenant was renewed. That the Lord was there, not only for everyone, but especially for the marginal and the vulnerable.

Well, we see That they want to walk with Jesus and have a great time with this Prophet, this Healer. And they don't want that guy over there on the side of the road – they just want him to shut up. They attacked him with their words, “Be quiet!”

Obviously, that isn't what Jesus would do. Is it? What we see Jesus do is stop and to tell that very crowd who wish to keep the marginalized marginalized, “Call him.”

Here's the duplicity, don't you think. They are suddenly enthusiastic because Jesus said, “Call him.” And so, “Well come on, come on! Jesus said it's okay.” And the man jumps up and throws off his cloak.

What does that mean? We don't go around dressed in cloaks very often, do we? Unless we're in a Halloween costume.

Think of the man there. This Bartimaeus. He is a beggar. He is the only beggar who is named in Mark's Gospel. Most of the people Jesus encounters in Mark's Gospel are nameless. They have a name, but it's not mentioned by Mark. But this one is.

He's the son of Timaeus. He's blind. We don't know how he became blind. Was it from birth? Was it later? Was it an accident?

But there he is – shunned. You kind of wonder where his family was. We know his father's name was Timeus, but what happened? Why is he on the side of the road begging? We don't know. But he's on the edge of the road. You know, the place where most people won't walk.

Can you imagine what he was feeling, sitting there begging? Ashamed. Put-upon by people who didn't know him or understand him. Ostracized, in a sense, like his ancestors in exile – on the edge of the road.

When he throws off his cloak, is that not him letting go of the shame, being the exile, being the outcast? And moving toward Jesus, who wants to have an encounter with him. Jesus wants to show his care for this man, but it has to begin with more than just, “Call him.”

Jesus asks a question, “What do you want me to do for you?”

Now. Most beggars, you know, when they're on the side of the road, they're just hoping someone will toss a coin their way. And possibly when he heard it was Jesus and he was crying out, “Son of David, have pity on me,” he was just hoping for a prayer or a blessing.

He doesn't expect this. Jesus is willing to be more than just a wonder-worker. He wants to encounter this man. "What do you want me to do for you?"

And so beyond coins, beyond blessings, he finally sees what he wants (and it's ironic to say it that way.) "I want to see."

Have you ever been asked a question and then you just blurted out the answer and you wonder where it came from? - From deep within you.

I remember doing that at least once. It was with Monsignor Brestin at Mount Saint Mary's Seminary in Cincinnati, where I went to interview with him. He was interviewing me, actually. To see, *do we really want this guy in the seminary?*

So the first thing out of his mouth, when he came in a little late, he said, "So! You want to return to the seminary."

And my response, "No." And he looked at me..."What?!" (chuckling in the background)

I said, "Monsignor, I have spent ten years in the seminary. I know what it's like. It's a hot house for orchids and it's hard. I'm not coming here just for that. I'm coming here because I am seeking ordination to the priesthood."

I did not rehearse that. I was as surprised as he was that it just blurted out of my mouth. But it was from deep within.

So. The blind man, Bartimaeus, he blurts it out because there is now this relationship. Jesus simply says, "Go your way. Your faith has saved you." And his sight returns.

And then he becomes disobedient. Jesus said, "Go your way." What does he do? He gets up and follows Jesus.

There's more to this than receiving that blessing, that cure. Jesus got deep within the guy. By doing so, the man began to follow.

It's a powerful story.

You know, as I've spent this week, off and on pondering this Gospel passage and the First Reading, it's been hard. Because it brings up for me three situations that aren't easy.

The first is: driving as I do, through the city and at intersections, whether in the median, or at the side of the street or whatever, someone is standing there begging. I'm busy! I'm trying to drive. Right? I'm kind of like the crowd, "Leave me alone." "I'm doing God's work."

Oops! I don't carry cash, as a rule. I have too much convenient plastic to do it. But when I see them, I can't help but think that they're on the margins. They're possibly exiles from their family. I don't know why.

But I also don't know what to do in this "hurry-scurry" world we have, where as much as I try not to, I'm judgmental, "You could do better." Then I'm really ashamed.

Or, recently at our parish festival, a young man whose name I'm not going to give you, just showed up to help. He showed up Thursday, Friday and Saturday. And he and I got put on a detail together on Thursday. We were putting the plastic sheeting on all the tables. (woohoo!) But you know, we got to talking and I found out that the young man is a recovering alcoholic, who calls Club East a very important part of his life.

And the young man...you know how we tend to think of drug addicts and alcoholics as not very bright...This guy is bright and he's got a really good vocabulary, which kind of excited me. He's searching through AA for the Divine in his life – for God. He doesn't know where that's going to take him, but he's searching.

That was quite the moment and every time I saw him, I thought, "God, you are doing some amazing work with this young man."

And then there's the Phillips 66 station at Washington and Arlington. I go there periodically when I've run out of points at Kroger. Why? Because it's the cheapest gas on the East Side of town.

Invariably, one out of two times, someone walks up as I am trying to pump gas and I'm on a journey and therefore, I've got a destination. They'll say, "Have you got a dollar for the bus?" I don't know if that's what they really want to use it for, but like I said, I don't carry cash.

So I'm faced with what you're faced with. What do I say? How do I say it? "I'm sorry. I don't have any cash on me." And I really don't want them to ask anymore because if they do, then we begin an engagement. There could be more need. And I'm on a journey.

I'm not proud of these things, my brothers and sisters, but I know I'm not alone. I could look at almost all of you and say, "Been there? Done that?"

Jeremiah and the Gospel ask us to take up into our lives the mind and heart of Jesus. I just hope that we do so. Take up the heart and mind of Jesus for those on the edges – the marginalized. Those most in need of our attention.