

Thirtieth Sunday of Ordinary Time – Cycle B (Jer 31:7-9; Heb 5:1-6; Mk 10:46-52)

The gospel reading today occurs right after Jesus experiences many difficulties with his disciples and their lack of understanding. He has explained three times to them that he must go to Jerusalem to suffer; to be humiliated; to die; and then to rise. Remember Peter's reaction when he first heard this: "We cannot stand the thought of someone as wonderful, as good and as powerful as you going through something as awful as this. This is a terrible idea." Jesus says: "Get behind me, Satan." And again he brings up the subject and his disciples don't seem to be able to even ask questions about it. Instead they argue about who among them is the greatest. And the third time two of his disciples – James and John – approach him and simply say, "Can we have the seats at your right and your left? We'd like to be in a position of power."

Jesus is trying to convey a message to the disciples that makes them feel uncomfortable, uneasy. They respond by changing the subject or trying to divert Jesus to their needs. As most humans, we would rather not deal with things that make us uncomfortable. In today's gospel, we find Jesus walking with a large crowd and they encounter the blind man, Bartimaeus, who was a nuisance and frankly a little bit embarrassing when they were trying to make a good impression on Jesus. In their viewpoint, Bartimaeus was unattractive to God. Beggars. Blind People. Imperfect people. These people are seen as people who are not in God's favor. Right away, the people around Bartimaeus try to quiet him. They say, "Be quiet. Don't call the master. You're just a beggar. You have no real value or importance. There are people today in our society that think that some life is disposable under the right circumstances. But still, Jesus responds to Bartimaeus and us, "What can I do for you?"

The topic of rights for the unborn is controversial – it makes us uncomfortable, uneasy. Just like when Jesus tried to explain his death and resurrection to the disciples, many people don't want to hear about rights for the unborn because it's complicated – it's controversial – and it upsets our quiet lives. Also, it's difficult to see the injustice, it's difficult to see the victims. I think that the rights of the unborn are minimized because abortions are legal. In our society, legal actions equals good morals. In a democratic society if you follow the law of the land, you suffer no consequences. It is as if our laws give us a framework for how to live our lives.

But I know people who are suffering after the loss of a child through abortion. I hear their constant awareness of guilt, loss, sadness, and deep, deep, grief for the loss of a shared life that could have been. They can't help but think of that child and the smiles they would have shared, the successes and failures all children grow through. I have personal experience of a child lost through abortion. I have felt the loss; I know what it feels like. Parents who have lost a child through abortion need our love, they need to feel the love of Jesus; they need to be in the Church right now where we can embrace them in the Body of Christ. Jesus responds to Bartimaeus and us, "What can I do for you?"

Jesus' response to Bartimaeus reflects the natural law and the key to the church teaching on social justice. The key to the church teaching on social justice is our preferential option for the poor. A sizable crowd was passing by, and the center of attention was Jesus. People were not paying attention to the man by the side of the road; his cries were a nuisance, and people tried to silence him. Bartimaeus symbolizes the marginalized of our society, the inconvenient and burdensome – in short, the unwanted. Crowds pass by them every day and don't even want to think about them. Jesus, however, does not pay

attention to the crowd or to those who tried to eliminate the nuisance. He paid attention to the man at the margins. And he called him and healed him.

In addition to my assignment to St. Joseph the Worker parish, the Archbishop has assigned me to be the Archdiocesan liaison to Project Rachel. It is through Project Rachel that we provide Rachel Vineyards weekend retreats to those parents who have suffered the loss of a child through abortion. We are concerned with all life because creation is a gift from God and we are stewards of God's creation. Stewardship is primarily an act of love. Parents who have lost a child through abortion need the love of the Church. They need to know that the Church is a Church of mercy, the Church is a Church of forgiveness, and the Church is a Church of love. Since people who have had abortions are likely to repeat we want to educate them. We want them to know that there are alternatives. We want them to know that the abortion will not solve their problems – it will create problems. We want them to know that when they are facing the question of unplanned pregnancy, the decision must be made between the mother, father, and God (and this includes the parents of a minor girl or boy). Woman should not have to go this alone. Rachel Vineyards weekend retreats provide healing, forgiveness, and closure to parents who have lost a child through abortion.

We need to promote a culture of life. There are some who want to silence the cries of the unborn, who constitute the most marginalized and oppressed segment of humanity today. Yet as a Church we are called to give urgent attention and priority to these children. We are called to embody the response of Christ, ignoring the rebukes of the “politically correct” segments of our society, and identifying ourselves with the “man on the margins.” Not only is this an imitation of Christ, but it is a fulfillment in our day of the prophecy of Jeremiah that we hear in the first reading. God's promise regarding his scattered and oppressed people is, “I will gather them.” We are called to gather back together those who are scattered by the legal fiction that their lives are not equal to the rest of people; to restore protection to those who would otherwise be scattered by the physical violence of abortion.

Just like when Jesus responds to Bartimaeus, we are always being asked by God “What can I do for you?” Not what can we do for God because He wants to serve us – He is the Servant Father. Bartimaeus simply responds “I would love to see.” Or in other words, “I would love to understand the kingdom better, I would love to know what life is all about. It seems really confusing to me.” Jesus says, “That's exactly what I have come to do, I have come to show you the truth. I will heal your blindness.” Jesus wants us to have life – life to the full. We can't totally enter into life if we are not whole, if we are hurt. We all need healing of some sort.

So, as always, look to Christ to know what life is all about; look to Jesus and how he led his life. Always strive to walk with Jesus. I pray that all people, all children of God, be given a fighting chance to live to the point where they can make their own choice to walk with Jesus. Then, all children of God, including you and me, will be able to hear God ask, “What can I do for you?” What will you ask of God?