

Overcoming Spiritual Blindness

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Glory to Jesus Christ!

In today's Gospel reading the Lord encounters a blind man sitting by the roadside of Jericho. This blind man, according to the account of St. Mark was named Bartimeus, which means "son of honor".

And this Bartimeus, though unfortunate in that he suffered from blindness, was truly a man of honor. He was a man of honor because though his physical eyes were shut, his spiritual eyes were open; for he recognized Jesus of Nazareth, Who was passing by that way, as the Messiah, the Son of David.

And for this reason, he cried out continually, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

And in answer to this cry, the Lord healed him of his physical blindness saying, "Receive your sight, your faith has made you well!"

Now there are many lessons which we can draw from today's Gospel reading:

There is the lesson of faith, for Bartimeus recognized Jesus as the Christ, calling Him by one of His messianic titles, "the Son of David", and believing that Jesus Christ could heal him.

There is the lesson of persistence, for Bartimeus refused to be silenced by the crowds but instead continually cried out to the Lord until he heard the words, "Arise, be of good cheer; He is calling you."

There is the lesson of thanksgiving, for not only did Bartimeus upon receiving his sight follow Christ, glorifying God, but even all the people when they saw this gave glory to God.

But perhaps today, as we celebrate the leave-taking of Theophany, the Feast of Lights, the most timely lesson is that of the need to have spiritual sight and to see the Light of Christ.

We know that to see with our physical eyes, two things are necessary. First, we have to have our eyes open. And second, we need to have light. For just as if one's eyes aren't open one can't see anything, so too if one abides in darkness one is as good as blind.

And the same is true of our spiritual eyes. For us to see anything spiritually, we need to have the eyes of our soul open, and we need to abide in the light of Christ.

We spoke last Sunday about how the process of joining the catechumens to the Church is called the process of illumination – for it is the process of accepting the light of Christ into one’s mind, heart, and entire being.

And we spoke of how the goal of the Christian life is to become children of the light, walking in the brightness of Christ’s commandments and thereby receiving from the Lord the light of life.

And in this sense, the Christian life can be seen as a continual opening of the spiritual eyes, a continual awakening from the dark sleep of sin, a continual revelation of the God who dwells in unapproachable light.

But this spiritual awakening which began with our baptism requires something of a struggle on our part, for it requires the forcefulness to spiritually “get out of bed” and accept the dawning of a new day.

In his fourteenth chapter to the Romans the Apostle Paul urges the Christian faithful to “awaken out of sleep” for as he says, “now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed”. And he continues, “the night is far spent, the day is at hand; therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.”

And to the Ephesians, he writes, “Awake, sleeping ones! And arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light.”

Similar quotations could be multiplied both from the Scriptures and the Fathers, but these are enough to see that the Christian life is one of awakening from the sleep of sin, from death to newness of life.

And so how do we rise from sleep, how do we leave the dark night of our sins behind us and live more fully in the light of Christ’s commandments?

Well, just like getting up in the morning, the day begins for us when we open our eyes. So too spiritually, our day begins when we open the eyes of our minds and hearts to the light of Christ.

Likewise our day ends and the night begins we close our eyes. So too spiritually, the day ends for us when we close our spiritual eyes to ways and teachings of the Lord.

And so, our effort as Christians should be to keep our spiritual eyes open at all times, during the day and during the night.

So that we could walk the course of our life here on the earth with a sort of double vision, an awareness not only of the world around us, but also an awareness of the presence of God who dwells with us and in us.

Then with this double vision, we will walk circumspectly, we will walk with wisdom, we will see things in a new light – the light of Christ. Our days will be brighter, our dealing

with others will be healthier, our patience in endurance of trials will be stronger, our words and thoughts will be more uplifting, and our understanding will be more profound – all because our eyes are open to the light of Christ.

Let us therefore, continually ask the Lord, like the once blind Bartimeus, to open our eyes so that we might follow Him, walking in the ways of His commandments.

For in this way, we will not only rejoice with Bartimeus as sons and daughters of honor, following Christ and giving glory to God, but we will also become children of the day, sons and daughters of the light, and heirs of the Lord's radiant and heavenly kingdom.

To Him be the glory together with His eternal Father and His all-holy, good, and life-creating Spirit, always now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Glory to Jesus Christ!