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Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Thomas Gumbleton | Nov. 2, 2006 The Peace Pulpit

So today as we listen to the gospel, we realize that we are coming to the end of this last journey of Jesus to Jerusalem. For six weeks now we have been listening to Jesus teach his disciples -- teach us -- as he walked this final journey. Jericho is the last stop before they get to Jerusalem where it will all happen as Jesus had told them. He will be handed over to enemies, people who hate him. They'll torture him, nail him to the cross, crucify him, but then on the third day he'll rise again.

Today we hear about this blind beggar who had heard about Jesus of Nazareth but never had the opportunity to confront him face to face. And so when he hears about Jesus coming, as we heard in the Gospel, he begins to cry out, "Jesus have pity on me!" When he comes before Jesus what does he want? "That I may see!" But his faith has already given him physical sight. What's even more important is that he begins to see who Jesus really is. He throws away his last possession, a ragged cloak that probably wasn't worth anything, and he gets on that road and he follows Jesus.

There's a very important symbolism in that healing because when the Gospel writers speak about miracles of giving sight, it isn't just physical sight -- it's insight, spiritual insight, going deeper, not seeing just with their eyes but seeing what's in their spirit, in their heart. And it's very interesting if you look at this Gospel of Mark how at the beginning, before they began the journey, Jesus had healed a blind person; now at the end of the journey, he heals a blind person. Clearly Mark is trying to tell us that we are maybe blind people -- we need that healing in order to understand this way of Jesus. During this journey as he's been teaching his disciples, they constantly misunderstand him because, I guess, deep down they really don't want to accept what he's saying. They're blind.

Maybe we're blind in a way. When we think back about that journey and the different teachings that Jesus provides, the very first part was about rejecting violence. Rejecting all violence, even to defend yourself. You can use other ways, but not violence. In our church we haven't been faithful to this teaching of Jesus. Oh, in the beginning, the first disciples understood it and lived it for two or three hundred years or longer, but now we justify violence.

Tomorrow I'm going to be speaking to some university students about conscientious objection. I'm sure for many of them what I will say will be a surprise because so many of us accept the fact that we have to have a military, some people have to go to war, some people have to kill, but not if we really follow Jesus. We would reject all of that. And there will be people who will object to what I say because, "Well, that's not realistic!" Well, maybe the way of Jesus isn't realistic if you simply follow as Jesus said to Peter, "Get behind me because you are following human ways not God's ways!" If we want to follow human ways, alright, but if we're going to

follow God's ways we need this deeper sight to see the way of Jesus.

Another thing that Jesus taught along the way that we find so hard to see the truth of is about wealth. It's harder for a rich person to enter the Reign of God than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle. He meant that metaphor truly. He wanted you to think of a camel trying to go through the eye of a needle; it's more difficult for that to happen than for a rich person to get to heaven. You want to believe that? Most people in our country don't. Even in our church we don't really accept this and follow it so we need this insight of Jesus, be able to see with his eyes, to follow his ways.

I'm not going to go through everything he tried to teach us along the way, but another thing that comes to my mind because of what's happened this past week or so ago is that Jesus taught us that in his community we have to be inclusive. Inclusive -- draw everybody in. Don't push anybody away. And so you break down and remove the barriers that we set up in our society and sometimes in our church between rich and poor, people of different races or ethnic backgrounds. We set up barriers in our country -- we're putting up a physical barrier to keep "those people" from Mexico out -- and in our church we've set up barriers that exclude people who are of a different sexual orientation.

Very disappointingly, within the last week or so ago, a Catholic high school within the archdiocese [of Detroit] fired one of its persons who had been working there for six years because it became public that she is lesbian. And now the Catholic bishops are going to publish a new document on pastoral ministry for gay and lesbian, transgendered and bisexual people and it's going to be a huge disappointment to people of different sexual orientations because it's a very great step backwards from where we were in 1994 when we published a document, "Always Our Children." Unless it's amended as it could be during the meeting in a couple of weeks, it's a step backwards -- by changing the word in the document from *orientation* to *inclination*. They're making it sound as though there really isn't something as sexual orientation -- it's just an inclination; of course you can get over it. That's not true and it's going to be very offensive and push people away from our church.

It's hard to hear what Jesus says and to follow it and we need that sight, the vision of Jesus, the understanding of Jesus to do it. Perhaps today as we listen to this Gospel we need to join that beggar along the roadside and cry out, "Jesus, Son of David, have pity on *me*! Let *me* see!" Yes, most of us here -- almost all of us -- have physical sight, but don't we all need that miracle of seeing that Jesus can provide in order to truly follow him? And so if we pray for it, I'm sure that God will help us to see this way of Jesus.

But perhaps also God will heal our blindness that afflicts us in another way and if this is healed we'll be better able to follow Jesus. We need to be able to see Jesus as he truly is -- not just Son of God but one like us in every way but sin -- because then we would understand -- Jesus knows who we are, knows how difficult it is for us to follow his way, but as we heard in the second lesson today in the Letter to the Hebrews, "Our high priest is not indifferent to our weaknesses for he was tempted in every way, just as we are, yet without sinning." Jesus understands our weaknesses and understands how difficult it is for us. He's able to understand the ignorant and erring for he himself was subject to weakness. If we can see that about Jesus, I'm sure that will help us to know that Jesus can change us so that we can be like him in his steadfast resolution to follow God's way all the way to Jerusalem and to the cross, no matter what it costs.

And also that miracle of sight -- if we pray for it during this liturgy - it will, I think, give us a spirit of hope; we will be able to see as Jeremiah saw what will happen when we finally follow the way of Jesus. "Shouting for joy, they will ascend Zion. They will come streaming up to God's blessing. The grain, the new wine and the oil,

the young of the flocks and the herds, they will be like a well-watered garden. No more will they be afflicted. I will turn their mourning into gladness; instead of sorrow I will give them comfort and joy. Thus speaks Yahweh." Jeremiah could see that, so in our Eucharistic prayer that we'll recite shortly we say, "One day Jesus will come again and then in his Kingdom, there will be no more suffering, no more tears, no more sadness."

We should be able to see that Reign of God as Jesus intended it to be. As we transform our world into the Reign of God, pray that we can be healed of our blindness so that we will see what God is offering to us -- the Reign of God. Pray that we will be able to see Jesus drawing us into his weakness so that we can have his strength. Pray that we will be able to see where Jesus is asking us to go as we follow him from this last stop at Jericho to Jerusalem where through his suffering and death and resurrection, he will make the Reign of God begin to happen.

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