

THIRTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (YEAR B)

October 24, 2021

Jeremiah 31:7–9 • Hebrews 5:1–6 • Mark 10:46–52

I.

Thursday was the feast of St. John Paul II—
a colossus.

As pope, he led the Church for 26 years,
from his election in 1978 until his death in 2005.

John Paul II traveled to 129 countries;
he spoke eight languages;
he canonized 482 saints;
he issued many important teaching documents;
he helped bring about the fall of Communism;
and he inspired thousands of people
by the example of his personal holiness.

For about half my life,
his was the name I heard, Sunday after Sunday, in the Eucharistic Prayer at Mass:
“John Paul our pope.”

Most people know about John Paul II.

Fewer people know about his predecessor, John Paul I (1912–1978).

Albino Luciani was pope for only 33 days in 1978;
he’s called the “September Pope”
because his pontificate spanned that month.

People found in John Paul I, a simple, friendly, and humble man.

He’s remembered, above all, for that broad smile of his—
the “Smiling Pope.”

It was recently announced that Pope John Paul I will soon be beatified;
that is, declared “Blessed.”

(Beatification is the Church's official declaration that a person is heaven, and that public veneration of this person is permitted in specific regions.)

The miraculous healing of a girl in Argentina, in 2011, was attributed to the intercession of John Paul I.

A miraculous healing is the usual path to beatification and canonization, which is interpreted as a sign that the holy person is in heaven.

II.

But not everyone who prays to a saint receives physical healing.

Physical healing is one sign of God's action, but it doesn't exhaust his work.

Today's Gospel narrates the healing of a blind man, Bartimaeus.

But there's more to this story than just the restoration of his sight.

This physical healing points to Jesus' identity as the Messiah or Christ: he is God's "anointed" or chosen one, who will bring about the even greater work of salvation from sin.

Jesus' healing of Bartimaeus alludes to the hope of the Jewish people after they were banished from their homeland during the Babylonian Captivity, as we hear in the First Reading:

"I will gather them from the ends of the world,
with the blind and the lame in their midst...
They departed in tears,
but I will console them and guide them...
so that none shall stumble."

Jesus performed many healings, which were a regular part of his public ministry.

But there were other staples of this ministry, including teaching and exorcisms.

Jesus didn't heal everyone,
and when he did,
evidently these miracles didn't convince everyone that he was the Son of God.

The healings were meant to express his identity,
and to validate his teaching,
for the sake of bringing people closer to God.

For this reason,
the healing of Bartimaeus has a heavy dose of discipleship.

Bartimaeus **calls out** to Christ:
“Jesus, son of David, have pity on me.”

And Jesus, in a sense, **calls** Bartimaeus to discipleship:

“Go your way;
your faith has saved you.”

Having been healed,
Bartimaeus chooses the way of discipleship:
“Immediately he received his sight and followed [Jesus] on the way.”

“The way” is more than a physical path.

Jesus is en route to Jerusalem.

Bartimaeus is following him there—
not only physically, but also spiritually.

In a sense,
Bartimaeus is moving toward sharing in Jesus' mission
of suffering, death, and resurrection.

But even before the healing,
Bartimaeus shows signs of discipleship.

He's certainly believes that Jesus is capable of healing him.

Bartimaeus also has grit.

The crowd tries to shut him up but he refuses to be silenced:
“He kept calling out all the more.”

Interestingly, and perhaps ironically,
the crowd tells him to, “Take courage,”
but Bartimaeus has already shown them courage.

Bartimaeus ready to encounter Christ:

“He threw aside his cloak, sprang up,
and came to Jesus.”

When Jesus asks him what he wants,
he expresses it genuinely.

But we don’t get the sense that Bartimaeus feels entitled,
or that he demands this healing from Jesus,
otherwise, he won’t believe in him.

Instead, Bartimaeus is a model of discipleship.

Bartimaeus’ healing—this encounter with Christ—
helps him to follow Jesus.

III.

Christ is also passing along our way.

He changes our lives,
bringing different forms of healing.

Our faith can save us from sin,
from all the things keep us from God and a happy life.

“Master, I want to see.”

Maybe Bartimaeus speaking for all of us.

We can follow him on the way.

