

SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year B

24 October 2021



Collect

Almighty ever-living God,
increase our faith, hope and charity,
and make us love what you command,
so that we may merit what you promise.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Readings and Commentaries

Many are familiar with the saying, “There are none so blind as those who will not see”. Few may know that it goes on to say: “The most deluded people are those who choose to ignore what they already know”. It seems to have appeared in 1546, but its origins may well go back to the prophet Jeremiah who said: “Hear this, O foolish and senseless people, who have eyes, but do not see, who have ears but do not hear” (5:21). This would make it a very ancient proverb indeed.

We could turn the saying on its head and declare that there are none so insightful as those who have been deprived of sight. This is certainly the case with the blind beggar of today’s gospel, Bartimæus, and his unnamed counterpart in the gospel of John (Chapter 9). Each of these blind men is blessed with insight into the true nature of Jesus, while the sighted people around them failed to see who Jesus really was. In the end such insight is a gift of God, but we can prepare ourselves for it by reading the word of God, reflecting on it, and praying with it.

Be warned: seeing with the heart can open up a path of discipleship that may be more than we’ve bargained for!

The Lord says this:

Shout with joy for Jacob!
 Hail the chief of nations!
 Proclaim! Praise! Shout!
 'The Lord has saved his people,
 the remnant of Israel!
 See, I will bring them back
 from the land of the North
 and gather them from the far ends of earth;
 all of them: the blind and the lame,
 women with child, women in labour:
 a great company returning here.
 They had left in tears,
 I will comfort them as I lead them back;
 I will guide them to streams of water,
 by a smooth path where they will not stumble.
 For I am a father to Israel,
 and Ephraim is my first-born son.

This exultant oracle uttered by Jeremiah promises the home-coming of God's people from the lands where they had been scattered. Even the weakest among them – the blind, the lame, mothers with children and mothers-to-be – will all be guided safely back. Tears will be replaced by comfort; plentiful water will be provided and the path made smooth. All this reveals God to be "a father to Israel".

Mention of the blind establishes a connection with today's gospel story, but there is a more striking link between the two readings. In Mark's gospel the cure of Bartimaeus is followed directly by Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem as the Messiah. Jeremiah's exclamations of praise have parallels with the shouts of the crowd that acclaim Jesus as he rides into the holy city.

Rarely does a reading begin with such exuberance. These opening acclamations should not be rushed through or moderated. The rest of the reading becomes more measured in tone but is still filled with a strong spirit of joy and hope. This text should be a pleasure for readers to proclaim.

Responsorial Psalm**Ps 125****Responsorial Psalm**

R. The Lord has done great things for us;
 we are filled with joy.
 When the Lord delivered Zion from bondage,
 it seemed like a dream.
 Then was our mouth filled with laughter,
 on our lips there were songs. R.
 The heathens themselves said: 'What marvels
 the Lord worked for them!
 What marvels the Lord worked for us!
 Indeed we were glad. R.
 Deliver us, O Lord, from our bondage
 as streams in dry land.
 Those who are sowing in tears
 will sing when they reap. R.
 They go out, they go out, full of tears,
 carrying seed for the sowing:
 they come back, they come back, full of song,
 carrying their sheaves. R.

The whole of Psalm 125/126 serves as the responsorial psalm today. It is part of the collection in the book of psalms known as the Songs of Ascent. These songs may have been prayed by pilgrims on their way up to the city of Jerusalem and the temple.

The response, adapted from the psalm, forges a link between past and present. It recalls the "great things" that the Lord had done, and lets the memory become a present wellspring of joy.

In harmony with the first reading, the psalm seems to recall a liberation that allowed Israel to return home. This marvellous event gave rise to laughter and songs; it also bore witness to other nations. Now the people are going through distress of some kind. They are in bondage again and "go out, full of tears." The memory of the Lord's saving action in the past gives the people the confidence they will "come back, full of song."

Because the response falls into two parts, the reader will need to announce it with care to make sure the congregation hears it in full before beginning to recite it themselves. The language of the verses will remind the reader that the psalms are poems. The reader will delight in the vivid images and repeated phrases that should not be reduced to prose.

A reading from the letter to the Hebrews 5:1–6

Every high priest has been taken out of mankind and is appointed to act for men in their relations with God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins; and so he can sympathise with those who are ignorant or uncertain because he too lives in the limitations of weakness. That is why he has to make sin offerings for himself as well as for the people. No one takes this honour on himself, but each one is called by God, as Aaron was. Nor did Christ give himself the glory of becoming high priest, but he had it from the one who said to him: You are my son, today I have become your father, and in another text: You are a priest of the order of Melchizedek, and for ever.

Second Reading

Today's excerpt from Hebrews follows on immediately from last week's and continues the same theme. Jesus is our high priest, appointed so by God, and shares our humanity in all its weakness. Once again the background to this passage is the Jewish liturgy for the Day of Atonement.

The author quotes from Psalms 2 and 109/110 to validate his claim for the priesthood of Christ. The mysterious figure of Melchizedek appears here for the first time before becoming the centre of attention in Chapter 7. He is referred to in the Old Testament in only two places – in Psalm 109/110 and in Genesis 14:18-20 – and nowhere else in the New Testament outside the letter to the Hebrews. Yet his name found its way into the Roman Canon (now the first Eucharistic Prayer) and the treatment given him in Hebrews heavily influenced the Church's theology of sacrifice and priesthood.

Those unfamiliar with the Jewish background to this text may not find it easy to follow. It needs to be prepared well and proclaimed clearly and steadily. The sense-line layout in the NRSV lectionary may help the reader become clear as to how the argument is built up. As usual, the NRSV makes use of inclusive language.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark

10:46–52

As Jesus left Jericho with his disciples and a large crowd, Bartimaeus (that is, the son of Timaeus), a blind beggar, was sitting at the side of the road. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout and to say, 'Son of David, Jesus, have pity on me.' And many of them scolded him and told him to keep quiet, but he only shouted all the louder, 'Son of David, have pity on me.' Jesus stopped and said, 'Call him here.' So they called the blind man. 'Courage,' they said 'get up; he is calling you.' So throwing off his cloak, he jumped up and went to Jesus. Then Jesus spoke, 'What do you want me to do for you?' 'Rabbuni,' the blind man said to him 'Master, let me see again.' Jesus said to him, 'Go; your faith has saved you.' And immediately his sight returned and he followed him along the road.

Gospel

Jesus' journey to Jerusalem began with the cure of a blind man (Mk 8:22-26, a passage not included in the lectionary), and now it finishes with another. The healing of Bartimaeus is the last act of Jesus before he enters the city for his passion and death. The blind man's address to Jesus as "Son of David" anticipates the future cry of the crowd, "Hosanna! . . . Blessing on the coming kingdom of our father David!" (11:10).

In last Sunday's gospel, when approached by James and John for a favour, Jesus asks them, "What is it you want me to do for you?". They make the mistake of asking for positions of power and glory, and are rebuffed. When Bartimaeus fronts up to him, Jesus asks the same question. When the beggar replies, "Master, let me see again," Jesus immediately affirms him and answers his plea.

The stark contrast between the two brothers and the blind beggar is shown earlier in the story. Not only is Bartimaeus ready to cast off his most precious possession – his cloak – in order to come to Jesus, but once he has received back the sight that restored his social respectability he chooses to follow Jesus. Whereas James and John recklessly claim they can suffer with Jesus, Bartimaeus makes the bold decision to follow him just as his way of the cross is about to commence.

This episode combines great human appeal with profound teaching.

Concluding Prayer

Solemn Blessing (Ordinary Time III)

Bow down for the blessing.

May almighty God bless us in his kindness
and pour out saving wisdom upon us.

Amen.

May he nourish us always with the teachings of the faith
and make us persevere in holy deeds.

Amen.

May he turn our steps towards himself
and show us the path of charity and peace.

Amen.

May the blessing of almighty God,
the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
come down on us and remain with us for ever.

Amen.

(Adapted from the Solemn Blessing for Ordinary Time III, Roman Missal p. 715)