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Quinquagesima

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Text: Luke 18:31–43

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

After the prophet Isaiah saw His overwhelming vision of the Lord God almighty, high and lifted up upon His throne and after the Lord cleansed Isaiah from his sins by sending an angel to touch the prophet's lips with a burning coal from off the heavenly altar, the Lord Himself commissioned and ordained Isaiah to preach. It's one of the most bizarre and mysterious ordinations imaginable. Isaiah 6:9–10, “<sup>9</sup>Go, and say to this people: “Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’ <sup>10</sup>Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.”

The prophetic and apostolic preaching ministry is charged with making those who see and hear to be blind and deaf. Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive, was Isaiah's commission. We see this mysterious dynamic in today's gospel text. The 12 disciples of Jesus, who can see and hear quite well, are blind and deaf to what Jesus is all about. The Lord told them in clear words, “Everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise” (vs. 31–33).

The Son of Man, Jesus, will fulfill the OT Scriptures in the events that are about to happen in Jerusalem. Those events include: being delivered over to the Gentiles (i.e., the Romans) for mockery and scorn, flogging and death. But after three days of death, He will rise from the dead. Betrayal, suffering, death, resurrection. Clear? Easily heard and understood? After being told these things, those hearing and seeing disciples are described this way (vs. 34), “But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said.” The words and message are clear. But without the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the disciples are blind to Christ's preaching. They see but do not perceive; they hear but are deaf to what is said. Does not the NT teach us, “The natural person does not accept the things

of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned” (I Cor. 2:14). Christian faith is established upon that which cannot be seen by the natural senses. The Holy Spirit creates faith to see, to perceive, know, and understand what otherwise cannot be seen.

The next section of today’s gospel text illustrates this beautifully. Beginning in vs. 35, we meet a blind man by the roadside begging as Jesus and the disciples drew near to Jericho. Mark’s gospel (10:46) tells us that the blind man was named Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus. He can’t physically see Jesus. But Bartimaeus hears the commotion created by the crowd. He learns that “Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.” He can’t see Jesus physically but he sees Jesus spiritually, by faith. “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (vs. 38) The phrase Son of David is messianic language similar to the phrase “the Son of Man.” That’s what Jesus called Himself when He told His disciples that He must be betrayed, suffer, die, and rise again. This blind man sees what His seeing disciples could not see. Jesus is the Son of David, the Messiah, come to deliver the people of this world from the ravages of sin, sickness, sorrow, and death.

Somewhere along the way, blind Bartimaeus heard about the life and deeds of Jesus; the Holy Spirit used that preaching of Jesus to create faith. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ (Rom. 10:17). Without ever meeting Jesus, without ever seeing Jesus or witnessing any miracles – he was blind after all, Bartimaeus sees Jesus for who He truly is. The Son of David who is able to save him from his blind affliction. So he cries out in faith!

In this regard, we are like Bartimaeus. We have never met Jesus, seen Him with our eyes, experienced a miracle and yet, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, we believe the preached word about Jesus. He’s the Son of David, the Son of God who was rejected, suffered, died for the sins of the world, and rose again for our justification. He’s the one who can answer my deepest prayer and give me the greatest deliverance. He’s the Son of David, the Messiah, the very Son of God come to this earth to be our Lord and Savior.

Though we are blind to His visible presence, we see Him present among us by faith. We see Him by the power of the Holy Spirit. We were born again to a living faith in the waters of Holy Baptism. In every Holy Communion, we perceive the Lord giving of Himself to us so that we can have His forgiveness, His undying life, His glorious inheritance unto salvation. Through the grace of the Holy Spirit, we see God so

clearly and joyously that we call Him, “Our Father who art in heaven...” Blind though are natural senses are to these great truths – and these are truths as real and certain as any data set derived from the empirical sciences – we see them clearly through faith. The apostle Paul describes such clarity in II Cor. 5:6–7, “So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight.” Take courage, dear faithful saints as you walk by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

But others are not so impressed with Bartimaeus’ faith (vs. 39a). Be quiet. You’re being obnoxious, too loud and pushy. Be silent. Don’t we hear such sentiments today? Believe whatever you want in private but don’t let it bother me by how you talk, act, work, or play in public. Don’t bring your faith to work, to public discourse, the voting booth, civic events, the economy, or anywhere else that might influence someone besides yourself. Drop all that nonsense about fearing, loving, and trusting in God above all things. Food, clothing, house, family, education, jobs, financial and emotional security, entertainment, pleasure, socialization and good standing within the community, are all more important than faith in some ancient, unseen, irrelevant deity.

But notice the stubborn faith of Bartimaeus. He cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” (vs. 39b) Faith created in Jesus by the Holy Spirit doesn’t really care what other people say and do. Faith cries out to Jesus. It’s His approval that we seek, not the world’s, or our family’s or friends’. Faith is not ashamed of Jesus, not afraid to call upon Him in every trouble. But rather, Holy Spirit-borne faith delights in calling upon Him in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving.

And Jesus delights to hear, “Lord, have mercy!” That’s why it comes up in our liturgy. The Kyrie we call it. The Church for 2,000 years has borrowed those words from blind Bartimaeus and prayed them to Jesus expecting the same results. Our Lord’s attention! His answer to our prayer! His divine intervention.

Jesus stops upon hearing Bartimaeus’ “Son of David, have mercy on me!” Our Lord asks him what he wants. Bartimaeus responds, “Lord, let me recover my sight” (vs. 41). Even before Jesus answers, there is faith. Jesus is Bartimaeus’ Lord. And his Lord answers. ““Recover your sight; your faith has made you well.’ And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him, glorifying God” (vs. 42–43). Matthew’s gospel (20:34) says that Jesus touched his eyes and healed them. The first thing Bartimaeus sees is the face of Jesus. What a great gift of grace and love.

But did you hear what Jesus said? Your faith has saved you! Bartimaeus received more than mere physical sight. He has the promise of salvation that will take him past death and the grave into the eternal, beatific vision of God Himself.

Jesus came to the earth to do more than place band aids over our ills. He came to fix them, to atone for them by being betrayed, suffering, dying, and rising again. Do not miss the connection between our Lord's preaching about Calvary and Easter in vs. 31–34 with His healing of Bartimaeus in vs. 35–43. That healing is rooted and grounded in our Lord's death and resurrection. Your forgiveness, your eternal healing, your resurrection unto eternal life are established in Jesus' betrayal, suffering, death, and resurrection. The Day will come when you will see Jesus with your physical, resurrected eyes. You will see God!

In the meantime, the Holy Spirit gives us faith that sees Jesus and saves us. Faith in Jesus, the Son of David, the Son of God. Faith to see and believe, a stubborn faith that will not be silenced or cowered when scorned or rejected. Jesus will not be deaf or silent to our prayers of faith. He hears and answers, now and into eternity. Praise be to our Lord Jesus Christ.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.