

Homily - Mark 10: 46-52
World Mission Sunday
30th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B

A touching story is told of a British missionary priest who lived in a remote part of Tanzania. He lived alone, a single white man among his African flock, speaking their language. One day a British government official arrived on a tour of the area. The Tanzanian children ran out to welcome the visitor. They entertained the official by clapping, singing and dancing. Once the official left, the children excitedly told the missionary priest, “We saw a white man! We saw a white man!” Some of the children said that the visitor was the first foreigner they had ever seen. The priest was amazed, and he exclaimed, “But I’m a white man. I’m a foreigner. And I’ve been living here with you all these years.” One of the children then said, “You’re not a white man dear Father; you’re Jesus, you are our Father.” - Well! Over one billion Catholics all over the world observe today as *World Mission Sunday*. And every Mission Sunday reminds us that transparent Christian life, as lived by this missionary, radiating the real presence of Jesus within, is the mission of every Christian.

Pope Pius XI instituted this annual observance of the *World Mission Sunday* 95 years ago by a Papal decree. And this annual celebration gives us a chance to reflect on the importance of mission work for the life of the Church. It reminds us that we are one with the Church around the world, and that we are all committed to carrying on the mission of Christ, however different our situations may be.

It was in 2015 that Pope Francis made his Papal visit to the Philippines. And, on the 18th of January 2015 during the Concluding Mass of his apostolic visitation, Cardinal Louis Antonio Tagle, Archbishop of Manila made a very moving speech to the Holy Father. And in it, he said the following: “Most Holy Father, You arrived in the Philippines 3 days ago. Tomorrow, you will go. Every Filipino wants to go with you. Yes! Every Filipino wants to go with you – not to Rome – but to the peripheries. We want to go with you to the shanties, to the prison cells, to the hospitals, to the world of politics, finance, arts, the sciences, culture, education, and social communication. We will go to those worlds with you to bring the light of Christ. We will go, Holy Father, with you where the light of Jesus is needed. And so, please, Holy Father, send us as your missionaries of light. Send us.”

Well, the theme of 2021 World Mission Sunday is this:— “*We cannot but speak about what we have seen and heard*” (Acts 4:20). And it is a summons to each of us to “own” and to bring to others what we bear in our hearts. In these days of pandemic, when there is a temptation to disguise and justify indifference and apathy in the name of healthy social distancing, there is urgent need for *the mission of compassion*, which can make that necessary distancing an opportunity for encounter, care and promotion.

There is a story told about a young soldier who returned home from the war in 1949 to find his beloved mother desperately ill with kidney problems. She needed an immediate blood transfusion to save her life. But, unfortunately, no one in the family shared the mother's very rare blood type of ‘AB Negative’. And blood banks didn't exist in those days.

The young soldier decided to gather his family together to say goodbye to his dearest Mom. As he was driving home from the hospital, he stopped to pick up another young soldier who was hitchhiking. The hitchhiker noticed the young man's tears, and asked him what was wrong. The young man blurted out the story of his dying mother. In silence, the hitchhiker took off his dog

tags and held them out to the young man. On the tags were listed his blood type: AB negative.

Well! His mother received her transfusion that night and recovered fully. Now, was it a coincidence? We don't know. But, this soldier and his family believed that the hitchhiker was an angel sent by God. Yes! These coincidences happen quite often for people of faith. Now, the Gospel of today, which tells of the healing of the blind man **Bartimaeus**, challenges us to strengthen our faith in Jesus the healer, and invites us to gain true spiritual vision.

The hero of our story in today's Gospel is Bartimaeus, someone who was blind from birth, a beggar, who was sitting by the side of the road, 'begging, waiting to be pitied'. He was not part of the in crowd. And he wasn't walking all the way to Jerusalem with Jesus. But when he heard it was Jesus who was walking by, he began to shout and say: "Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me".

Now, for crying out to Jesus, Bartimaeus had to suffer terrible abuse from the crowd. The folks around him said: "Keep quiet. You are blind. You can't bother the Rabbi". But the blind beggar stands his ground. He refuses to be bullied into doing what the crowd wants. Instead, he does what he thinks is right.

Jesus does not treat Bartimaeus like a blind person. Jesus doesn't stop him or say to his disciples: "Look how blind he is. Let us go over and pity him". No! Jesus says: "Call him". Remember, that is what Jesus does to everybody. He calls us. Jesus is not focusing on Bartimaeus' limitations. He is focused on what Bartimaeus can become. So, Bartimaeus is called, and something surprising happens.

Mark the evangelist would say: Bartimaeus threw aside his cloak, sprang up and came to Jesus. And that is what strikes me here. He moves towards Jesus even when he is still blind. He starts moving towards Jesus even though he still can't see Jesus, even though he can't see clearly how he is going to get to Jesus through the crowd. But, in order for healing to take place he has got to move towards Jesus. And I believe, Jesus is telling each of us the same thing today as he told Bartimaeus: "Get up from where you are, start moving toward me, even though you can't see clearly where you are headed or how it is going to work out".

Well, all of us have something in our lives that needs healing. Some part of us is crying out for Jesus's help. For some of us perhaps it is a physical challenge, a medical problem, a diagnosis; perhaps something we faced a long time or heard about from the doctors. For

others it could be an emotional or psychological difficulty, for some it could be a financial crisis, for others injustice in work places or conflicts in family life or even an addiction. In all these, we need to turn to Jesus for help. In Christ, we find 'life and hope' and we need to move towards Him even when we can't see clearly the finish line.

As St. James would remind us in his epistle 4. 8: "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you". On this World Mission Sunday, let us resolve to draw near to God and be assured, God will draw near to us. And may we become channels / instruments who will bring God's love and light to everyone we meet in our lives. God bless you all, **Amen.**