

Maronite Monks of Adoration

“THAT I MAY SEE”

“Master, let me receive my sight.” (Mk: 10:51)



Christ healing the blind

During His earthly ministry, the Gospels show Our Lord healing the blind and restoring their sight. These healing miracles serve firstly to prove Our Lord’s identity as the Divine Son of God, for only God can perform such miracles. Also very importantly, they manifest essential divine truths in that they not only show a physical event — the blind receiving their physical sight — but more importantly they *see* who Jesus really is: the Divine Son of God and His Gospel as the supreme rule of life. For that reason the Gospel according to St. John doesn’t use the word “miracle” but instead the word “sign” to denote this divine reality taking place. So in this newsletter issue we will look at the Biblical theme of blindness and sight as shown us by the Gospel accounts of the healing of the blind man Bartimaeus (Mk. 10: 46-52) and the healing of the man born blind (John. 9:1-41). The importance of these accounts can be seen in that in the Maronite Church one of the Sundays of Great Lent is called the “Sunday of the Healing of the Blind Man Bartimaeus.” Whereas in

the Roman Church one of the Sundays of Lent (in the “A” cycle) has this gospel passage proclaimed. During the “B” and “C” cycles this gospel account is proclaimed during one of the Lenten weekdays. Also in the Patristic Church this account was used, along with the Story of the Woman of Samaria and the Raising of Lazarus (also in the Gospel according to John) as immediate catechesis during the Lenten season for the catechumens preparing for Baptism at Easter.

Besides its obvious physical suffering, blindness in the New Testament denotes the spiritual darkness of unbelief or a lack of spiritual perception. So one may have his physical sight and thinks he sees, but in reality is spiritually blind in not recognizing Jesus or in rejecting His Gospel. Those that he heals not only have their physical sight restored, but more importantly, come to see who Jesus really is and believe, thereby gaining eternal life. Through the healing of these blind people we thereby come to see what true faith in Jesus really consists of.

The healing of the blind man Bartimaeus takes place in the Gospel according to St. Mark just before Our Lord makes His triumphal entrance into Jerusalem (Hosanna – Palm Sunday). It is also the last miracle of Jesus in Mark, and it thus carries considerable symbolic importance, as if it were a summary of all Jesus’ active ministry. Bartimaeus, sitting by the roadside hears a commotion and hears that it’s Jesus of Nazareth. Recognizing his own condition of physical blindness he nevertheless “sees” who Jesus really is: that He is the Son of David and can heal him. While physically blind, he spiritually sees (real sight)

and thereby believes who Jesus really is and that He can heal him. Interestingly this account takes place after Our Lord asks Peter, “Who do men say that I am?” Peter “doesn’t see” because Our Lord has to reprimand him even calling him “Satan” (“Get behind me Satan! For you are not on the side on God, but of men!”) Peter has spiritual blindness. Then James and John, sons of Zebedee, also have spiritual blindness in asking for the “places of honor” next to Jesus in the heavenly kingdom. Our Lord tells them, “You do not know what you are asking.” They also have spiritual blindness. Peter, James and John have a worldly vision, which is blindness, and not a spiritual one which considers what the world regards as “greatness” to be true blindness.

Do we see in Jesus the Son of God Who can heal us of the blindness of our sins and the blindness of what the world considers so important? Much spiritual blindness exists in that many refuse to see Jesus as the Son of God. Instead he is “seen” simply as a good man Who simply affirms whatever lifestyle we choose to construct for ourselves. We “see” our healing in worldly things: money, possessions, sensual pleasures, sexual indulgence, prestige, all of which constitute true blindness. As Brother Simeon (Erasmus Leiva-Merikakis), Trappist monk of St. Joseph’s Abbey says in his excellent commentary on the story of Bartimaeus, *“Let us learn above all that the first thing we have to admit is our own blindness. We may not be blind in our body; but we are surely blind in our soul, and like the disciples we have to submit to this pilgrimage, following Jesus incessantly, so that He, by means of His healing presence, can enlighten the eyes of our heart and enable us to contemplate him as He is.”* What the world and our culture offer constitutes spiritual blindness, only Jesus can heal us of it.

Having heard that it is Jesus of Nazareth coming by, Bartimaeus starts shouting for Him and even though the crowd tells him to shut up, **he won’t**. He “sees” who Jesus is and won’t let “public opinion” deter him from calling out to him. Brother Simeon continues, *“Do I have the boldness of Bartimaeus, or am I instead ruled by different forms of timidity, shame,*

bad conscience, fatalism...We Christians must implore our Father with all the boldness and daring of the child who knows that nothing can be denied by the God who loves us and who is the Lord of heaven and earth.”

Bartimaeus then throws off his cloak and runs to Jesus. He doesn’t waste any time in going to Jesus. By throwing off his cloak he shows that he leaves all behind in order to go to Jesus: nothing will hold him back. What “cloak” do you and I have to throw off in order to go to Jesus. The cloak in essence represents the world and all its false allurements. For us to go to Jesus we must throw it off with the immediacy of Bartimaeus. The cloak of the world, money, possessions, sensual pleasures, sexual indulgence, and prestige weighs us down. It is in throwing this off and coming to Jesus that we receive our true “sight.”

In the story of the man born blind, found in chapter 9 of the Gospel according to St. John, much of the above applies. To that we can consider this. It is through a series of confessions of who Jesus really is and at considerable cost to himself, that this man receives his sight. He is one of the few in the Gospel to “see” who Jesus really is and says, *“Lord, I believe.”* As a result, he gets expelled from the synagogue. “Seeing” who Jesus really is and believing Him will get us “expelled” from much in the world today. Here we have the great paradox of the Gospel: blindness will bring us many comforts from the world while “sight” will bring us a cross. Are we willing like Bartimaeus and the man born blind to “see” who Jesus really is, throw off our worldly cloak, and if necessary suffer expulsion in order to have our sight?

One of the truly great churchmen of our Church today, Cardinal Raymond Burke, gives an accurate statement of the spiritual blindness that affects so many of us in the Church today. *“I believe that the greater part of the cause for this unfortunate mindset is the loss of the sense of sin. Many people have not been taught the ten Commandments as the law of life which God has given to us from the beginning – that the Ten Commandments are the explication of the natural moral law which God has written in the hearts of everyone. Consequently, people do not have a sense*

of their need to be redeemed, that they are dependent on the help of God's grace in order to live a good life. At the same time, many have lost all sense of the virtue of humility. In other words, they have lost the sense that they are creatures and sons and daughters of God who depend completely upon Him for their very life and continued existence. They have lost sight of the fact that

He created them and called them into being according to an order that leads to happiness not only in this life, but the promise of eternal happiness in the life to come.”

Here we have spiritual blindness from a modern day St. Athanasius. So, let's throw off that cloak. ✠