

Meditations: Thursday of the Eighth Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the eighth week of Ordinary Time.

WHEN JESUS left Jericho, surrounded by his disciples and a large crowd, a blind man named Bartimaeus was found *sitting by the roadside, begging for alms* (Mk 10:46). Bartimaeus, accustomed perhaps to a more peaceful environment, was put on alert by the commotion around him. He couldn't see, but we can easily imagine what he heard: the

clamor of the approaching crowd, the footsteps on the dusty ground, the complaints of those urging him to clear out of the way, all the small details he had learned to perceive through his heightened sense of hearing because of his blindness. His limitations didn't stop him from being receptive to what was happening around him: his heart was sensitive and ceaselessly seeking. After discovering that Jesus of Nazareth was the cause of the commotion, he didn't hesitate to cry out, *Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!* (Mk 10:47). His cry was not merely a plea for mercy but also a confession. He heard Jesus called "Jesus of Nazareth," but proclaimed Him as the "Son of David," anticipating the acclamation of the people later on when our Lord entered Jerusalem. Clearly, his inner senses were somehow prepared to recognize the Master.

However, Bartimaeus's words were not well received by those present: *Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet (Mk 10:48)*. We don't know why the people didn't want him to speak. Perhaps they assumed that the blind man only sought alms, or maybe they thought the Master had no time to spare for someone like him. Despite the reproaches, Bartimaeus didn't succumb to the atmosphere. He knew that the long-awaited Messiah was passing by, and he couldn't let this opportunity slip away. "Don't you too feel the same urge to cry out? You who also are waiting at the side of the way, of this highway of life that is so very short? You who need more light, you who need more grace to make up your mind to seek holiness? Don't you feel an urgent need to cry out, 'Jesus, son of David, have pity on me?' What a beautiful aspiration for you to repeat again and again!"^[1]

JESUS' RESPONSE must have surprised his companions: He stopped and called Bartimaeus. He heard his plea filled with faith, and wanted to speak with the man, to have him close by, to listen to him, to know what he wanted. His whole attention was directed toward Bartimaeus. While those surrounding Him sought to silence the blind man, our Lord responded by calling him. Requests for help don't bother him, because He came to save us, to heal our faculties with his own.

Meanwhile, Bartimaeus, who had not ceased crying out, heard words that enkindled his hope: *Take heart. Get up; he is calling you (Mk 10:49)*. His persistence had already borne its first fruit, but it was not the healing of his blindness. "Our hearts race, because we realize that the Light is gazing upon us, that kindly Light which invites us to come out of our

dark blindness. Jesus' closeness to us makes us see that when we are far from him there is something important missing from our lives. His presence makes us feel in need of salvation, and this begins the healing of our heart."^[2]

As soon as he heard that the Master was calling him, Bartimaeus acted decisively: *Throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus (Mk 10:50)*. That cloak was much more than the blind man's only possession; it was his home, where he would lie down to spend the night or seek refuge from inclement weather. But upon hearing our Lord's call, he recognized what truly mattered. "Never forget," St. Josemaria writes, "that Christ cannot be reached without sacrifice. We have to get rid of everything that gets in the way."^[3] It might seem that Bartimaeus was acting rashly by renouncing what little he had, but deep down, he was

doing the most sensible thing: drawing near to the One who could restore the “cloak” of his humanity, which had been torn by his blindness. Bartimaeus found his new home in Jesus, the refuge that heals wounded humanity. Through the grace of the sacraments, Jesus Himself renews this offering. Through the mediation of the Church’s action, we hear these words once again: *Take heart. Get up; he is calling you (Mk 10:49).*

WHEN BARTIMAEUS found himself face to face with Jesus, the Master asked him, *What do you want me to do for you? (Mk 10:51).* The blind man's faith may have wavered at various points in his life, and perhaps it was still fragile, uncertain. “What I want is obvious,” he might have thought. “If this man is the Messiah, He should know...” But Bartimaeus didn’t dwell on his doubts. He responded with

simplicity, *Rabbi, let me recover my sight (Mk 10:51).*

Jesus listened to the blind man's request and didn't reject it. He wanted to embrace his weakness. But even more deeply, He wanted to receive that act of faith in his ability to heal and the recognition of who He truly was. *Then Jesus said to him, 'Go; your faith has healed you.'*

Immediately he received his sight (Mk 10:52). With these words, Jesus authoritatively commends Bartimaeus's conduct and imparts a lesson to those witnessing the scene. Bartimaeus's perseverance in prayer, even in the face of others' rejection, as well as his promptness in responding to the call and his detachment from all he possessed, were not the result of thoughtless impulsiveness, personal ambition, or a desire for attention. They sprang from his faith, a faith that had gradually taken root in his heart as

he had heard more and more about Jesus. He may have already cried out inwardly, pleading for his healing. In any case, the faith that moved him to persist and overcome difficulties, strengthened by Christ's action, also led him to become a disciple. The account of this encounter concludes by telling us that *he followed Jesus along the road*" (Mk 10:52).

The Gospel does not mention this person again. We can assume that he no longer sat by the roadside begging for alms, but went out to meet people and share his encounter with Jesus. If he could not keep silent when he knew that the Messiah was near, what would he not do after being called and healed by the Master? The Virgin Mary will assist us in approaching her Son with the faith of Bartimaeus, in order to ask Him for light and strength to follow Him on the way.

[1] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 195.

[2] Pope Francis, Homily, 4-III-2016.

[3] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 196.

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