

HOLY GOSPEL..... Matthew 20:29-34, RSV

*Last week we read our Lord's third passion prediction, along with the request of the mother of James and John. Now we read of Jesus healing two blind men.*

*Before the Gospel:*

☐ The Holy Gospel according to Saint Matthew, the Twentieth Chapter:

☑ **Glory to you, O Lord.**

<sup>29</sup>And as they went out of Jericho, a great crowd followed him. <sup>30</sup>And behold, two blind men sitting by the roadside, when they heard that Jesus was passing by, cried out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" <sup>31</sup>The crowd rebuked them, telling them to be silent; but they cried out the more, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!" <sup>32</sup>And Jesus stopped and called them, saying, "What do you want me to do for you?" <sup>33</sup>They said to him, "Lord, let our eyes be opened." <sup>34</sup>And Jesus in pity touched their eyes, and immediately they received their sight and followed him.

*After the Gospel:*

☐ The Gospel of the Lord.

☑ **Praise to you, O Christ.**

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

These two blind men sitting by the roadside cry out their Kyrie: "Have mercy on us, Son of David." They have no one to intercede for them, no one to present them to Jesus. The centurion, by contrast, recommended his servant to Jesus. And so we read:

<sup>5</sup>As he entered Caper'na-um, a centurion came forward to him, beseeching him <sup>6</sup>and saying, "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, in terrible distress." (Matthew 8:5-6, RSV)

And at the start of things, Nathaniel had Philip to point him to Jesus:

<sup>45</sup>Philip found Nathan'a-el, and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." (John 1:45, RSV)

Lazarus had his sisters Mary and Martha to intercede with Jesus for him:

<sup>1</sup>Now a certain man was ill, Laz'arus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. <sup>2</sup>It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Laz'arus was ill. <sup>3</sup>So the sisters sent to him, saying, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." (John 11:1-3, RSV)

But these two men alongside the road have no one to intercede for them. They have no apostle like Philip, they have no friends to recommend them to Jesus. They just call out their Kyrie. Lord, have mercy.

In fact, not only must they call to Jesus alone, with no friend to help them, but people try to hush them up. The crowd rebuked them, telling them to be silent. But they redoubled their efforts. I read the Bible verse and I admire these two blind men:

<sup>31</sup>The crowd rebuked them, telling them to be silent; but they cried out the more, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!"

And why shouldn't they cry out for help? They have heard tell that Jesus had done wonders in the past. He had healed people in the past, like the man with the withered hand. Maybe he will heal them too. They do not mean to be put off by the scolding of the crowd.

And Jesus healed them. Jesus might have had much on his mind... places to go and work to do... but he takes time to heal them. Why? Because he is moved with pity. We should be pleased to think that that is how he regards each of us: He knows our aches and pains, he knows our sorrows and disappointments, he knows our longings and our regrets, and he is moved with pity for us. We are going to experience that good pity by and by, if not in this earthly life, then in heaven.

This brief story of the two blind men is one of a good number of stories in the New Testament about perseverance in prayer. I think the closest parallel is the Canaanite woman back in Matthew 15 — the woman who pleaded with Jesus to heal her daughter. In that story, it is not the crowds, but Jesus himself who tries to hush her up. He even calls her a dog. But she perseveres in asking Jesus for help, and in the end Jesus praises her in a way that, as far as I can remember, goes beyond any praise he gave to his Twelve disciples:

<sup>28</sup>Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly. (Matthew 15:28, RSV)

What Chrysostom said about that story perhaps we can say about this story too — the story of the two blind men: Jesus knew in advance that these two blind men were people of strong faith. He does not stop the crowd from rebuking the two for crying out to him. He is eager for them to redouble their cry, in spite of opposition, because he wants his disciples and the crowd to see a good example of perseverance in prayer. They just do not give up.

This story of the two blind men is a good chance for me to lift up Martin Luther's second reason why we must be people of prayer. His first reason is that God commands us to pray. His second reason is about the fulfillment of the prayer. Luther writes this:

In the second place, what ought to impel and arouse us to pray all the more is the fact that God has made and affirmed a promise: that what we pray is a certain and sure thing. As he says in Psalm 50[:15], "Call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you," and Christ says in the Gospel in Matthew 7[:7–8], "Ask, and it will be given you," etc. . . . "For everyone who asks receives." Such promises certainly ought to awaken and kindle in our hearts a longing and love for prayer. For by his Word, God testifies that our prayer is heartily pleasing to him and will assuredly be heard and granted, so that we may not despise it, cast it to the winds, or pray uncertainly. (Luther's *Large Catechism*, Kolb-Wengert)

Luther is as innocent as a child here. He simply takes Jesus at his word. Jesus said that our God will grant our prayer — not just listen to it, but grant it. They say that Luther prayed maybe three hours each day. Here we can see why: he relied on the promises of Jesus.

And perhaps we can go a little farther and see why Luther was so confident that our God will grant our prayers. It is because of the Holy Spirit. St. Paul teaches us that the Holy Spirit improves our prayers. The picture I get is that the Holy Spirit is like a wise, old attorney who knows how to put our case before God the Father in such a way that the prayer can be granted. Listen to how St. Paul puts the matter in Romans 8:

<sup>26</sup>Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. <sup>27</sup>And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (Romans 8:26-27, RSV)

The Spirit does not mangle or misrepresent our prayers. Rather, he goes to the heart of the matter. In sometimes confused ways, what we human beings want is to be loved. Case by case, we seek to be treated with love. We might cry out for revenge or some misguided request, but what we are seeking is that we should be loved in the particular details before us. So, if I understand St. Paul right, the Holy Spirit correctly formulates our prayer so that in each particular case, it can be answered by God the Father in a way that really satisfies the hungry heart.

So these two blind men pray. They cry out to Jesus, and their prayer is a worthy one. They pray for sight. I think that many of us would really grieve if we could not read or if we could not see our wife or husband or children or if we could not see the sunset at the end of the day. Now these two men can do such things. They persevered in prayer. They brought their requests to Jesus, and that is a good thing to do because Jesus is the Man of Compassion. And to him belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen.