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The Gift of Sight and Insight through Faith

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The Gift of Sight and Insight through Faith

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Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Sunday Readings for October 25, 2009 for Cycle B:

Jer 31:7-9; Ps 126; Heb 5:1-6; Mk 10:46-52

THE GIFT OF SIGHT AND INSIGHT THROUGH FAITH

Lawrence E. Frizzell

The dry climate, the dazzling sunshine and an incredible number of flies combine to cause people of the Near East to suffer from many ailments of the eyes. Visitors to these areas soon become aware that blindness is all too common. This being true today, when at least some modern medical treatments may be applied, one can imagine that the tragic problem was even more prevalent in ancient times.

Blindness and lameness were among the afflictions that barred a descendant of Aaron from exercising his priesthood (Lv 21:16 and 20). Such handicaps also rendered people unable to take on other roles of leadership in the community. During the exile many of these people must have worried whether they would be able to return to the promised land. With great sensitivity, the prophets assured them that they, as well as the women and children, would be cared for. The prophet Isaiah even included a vision of the desert being transformed by God's presence; the blind, the deaf and the lame would be cured so that they could make the journey to Jerusalem (Is 35:5-6). Although this Sunday's passage from Jeremiah's promise of restoration does not speak explicitly of healing, the special care for the weak is an evident sign of God's love. "For I am a father to Israel; Ephraim is my first-born: (31:9). The mention of the Northern Kingdom (often known by its most influential tribe, Ephraim) indicates that Jeremiah hoped for the return of all twelve tribes. "The days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah" (Jer 31:31).

The oral teachings of priests, prophets and sages were incorporated into written form and eventually were read weekly in the Temple and synagogue. People realized that the return from Babylonian exile, wonderful though it was, did not exhaust the potential of these instructions. Indeed, aspects of the prophecies were fulfilled and the covenant was renewed as people offered sacrifices in the Temple rebuilt after the encouragement of Haggai and Zechariah inspired the people. However, only three tribes (Judah, Benjamin and Levi) returned, so God's mercy would be manifest again. Indeed, the nations would come to worship at Mount Zion (Is 2:2-4; Zec 2:15-17; 8:20-23; 14:16-21). Although at times this work of God is promised directly without a mediator, often the prophets spoke of a new David, anointed to inaugurate the Kingdom (Is 9:5-6; 11:1-16; Jer 23:5-6; Ez 34:24, etc.).

When Jesus and his disciples were on pilgrimage to Jerusalem (Mk 10:32) they passed through Jericho. Somehow a blind beggar heard about the work of Jesus; with an incipient faith that the Messiah had come, he cried out: "Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me!" (10:47). When Jesus called him, the man addressed him with the title, "Rabboni." Like "Rabbi" (my great one), it showed reverence for Jesus as a teacher. Did he realize already that if he received his sight he could join Jesus on the pilgrimage? Was he expressing a desire to become a disciple? Jesus commended the

man for his faith and indicated that no further level of commitment was needed. "Be on your way, your faith has healed you!" (10:52). However, the man was not deterred from seeking to know Jesus more deeply. "Immediately he received his sight and started to follow him up the road" (10:52).

The gift of sight would enable the man to take his place within the community and to exercise his human dignity and covenant fellowship in new ways. Because he had recognized Jesus as Son of David through listening to others, now he could see Jesus, not only with restored eyes but with a growing faith. That becomes the challenge for each of us. From ancient times, many Christians have made his initial prayer their own. We all need to be healed, restored to wholeness, so we cry out: "Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me!"