

THE EMMAUS SERIES

30th Sunday Year B

Jeremiah 31:7-9

Hebrews 5:1-6

Mark 10:46-52

Lord, let me see

Mark invites us to join him as he describes Jesus' progress to Jerusalem: situating ourselves among the group that – though they are truly attached to the Saviour – still have so much to learn. At Jerico, with the journey to Jerusalem almost completed, Mark includes the story of Bartimeus the blind beggar. Typical of Mark's style, the brief story has a vivid ring of immediacy. But it also has a telling lesson. Making the blind see is the first of the messianic signs (see Is 42:7) appealed to by Jesus, when – from his prison – John the Baptist sent his friends to ask of Jesus, 'Are you the one who is to come?' (Lk 7:22). Jesus is surrounded by blindness – the bewildered confusion of the twelve; the cruel reaction of the crowd, who 'scolded Bartimeus and told him to keep quiet'; the blindness of those in Jerusalem determined to destroy him. Through his miracle, Jesus makes Bartimeus a living sign of what he is doing in the name of his Father – healing the world's blindness, leading the human family to see in him the truth of God's ways.

God's grace has prepared the blind beggar. As he works the miracle for him, Jesus commends his 'faith'. Unfortunately, many people have a very abstract understand of 'faith' – as an acceptance of revealed truths. 'Faith' has a very concrete meaning when it is referred to by Jesus. For old Israel, God was known through the 'great things' God had done for Israel. God had a plan that was unfolding through the history of the chosen people. The reading from the prophet Jeremiah gives us a glimpse of the startling confidence of old Israel's faith. Though the people have lived through the horrors of defeat and exile, they must look forward, the prophet assures them, to a future filled with blessings – 'Shout with joy... Proclaim! Praise! Shout! The Lord has saved his people'. If they 'left in tears' for the trials of life in a foreign land, their return will be like a new Exodus, the whole company – the strong and the weak – will be led back, as God shows himself to be their loving 'Father'. The 'faith' Jesus frequently speaks of as he works a miracle is a blessed openness that recognises in his coming that the Father's generous plan is beginning to be realised. In contrast to those around Jesus, Bartimeus has this openness. He is the first person in the gospel accounts to address Jesus publicly with the messianic title, 'Son of David' – a title Jesus avoided because of the political overtones it had assumed in his time. He throws off his cloak and hurries forward to ask for the miracle that had been promised as a sign of the messiah of Israel's hopes. His readiness is instantly rewarded, and he joins the company of Jesus' disciples. It is unusual for a person miraculously healed to be named in the gospels. Perhaps Bartimeus was a character who became well known in the apostolic community – soon to be dramatically enlightened by the blessings of the Saviour's Paschal Mystery.

The reading from Hebrews develops the theme of Christ, 'given the glory of becoming high priest of the order of Melchisedech' by the Father. Through his resurrection, in the Paschal Mystery, he is revealed as a messiah far greater than Israel's expectations – the eternal Son who comes forth from the Father.

John Thornhill sm