

30<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary time cycle B  
October 29, 2006

Into the little cubicle I went, armed and ready for battle. I was about to purchase my first brand-new car, after scrimping and saving for it for years. I had done my research: first on what would be a good, reliable, sturdy car to buy, and then on how to negotiate with the car dealer. I learned about mark-ups, and how to determine the actual cost of the car to the dealer. I learned just how much money the salesman should realistically be expected to go over the actual cost, so that he could make a profit, and I was cognizant of that and I wanted to be fair; after all, this was how he made his living. So we sat down, the salesman and I, and I was ready for some tough negotiations. I knew where I was going to start, and I knew what my absolute, final top offer would be. It didn't quite turn out the way I anticipated, though: he asked me to pitch a number, which I did, a number which was by all accounts ridiculously low, and that I knew he wouldn't accept, and I anticipated this back and forth bidding until finally, out of desperation to make a sale at all, he would take my highest real offer. But instead, he shot me back a number which was actually lower than what I was willing to go for my best offer. Deal sealed: I got the car for less than what I was willing to spend. Too bad for him that day, though, because he gave away a couple hundred more dollars. If he had asked for it, I would have paid it, but since he didn't ask, he didn't get. If we're lucky in most negotiations, we might get *what* we ask for. But rare is that occasion when we go in and ask, and leave with even more.

In today's Gospel we heard the story of Bartimaeus, a blind man who was sitting by the roadside begging when Jesus came by. I think we can safely assume that he was begging for alms; highly unlikely that he would have sat there, asking passers-by to please give him his sight back. But when he hears that this man Jesus Christ is passing his way, he asks for more than alms. He asks for more because he believes what he has heard about Jesus: he believes that Jesus can work miracles, he believes that Jesus has the power to restore his sight; he believes Jesus can do this, if he asks. Imagine, if Bartimaeus had stopped at asking for alms, or worse yet, if he listened to the people around him telling him to be quiet, and didn't ask for anything at all? He might have gotten a couple of coins; but look at how much he would have missed. Think of how he would have felt later if he learned that that was his one and only opportunity, and he had his friends coming to him and saying, you know, you should have asked Jesus to cure you when you had the chance. Instead of getting those alms that you've since spent, you could have had your sight back right now. So, more than just a story that reiterates for us Jesus' power over the created order, it's also a cautionary tale: how much might we be missing out on, just because we're not asking?

There are different ways to ask for things: we can go into a situation and boldly insist on getting something, or we can go in and just kind of sort of hint at what we'd kind of like to get: *you know, if it's not too much trouble, if you don't mind*. And too, when we approach God, there are

different ways of asking. Saying “Lord, hear our prayer” at the end of a petition is good, and we’ll do that here today, but how much more forcefully do we ask when we spend half an hour on our knees in front of the Blessed Sacrament, truly pleading with God and pouring out our souls before him? We speak quite frequently of stewardship, and when we do, most people automatically think “money.” Which is too bad, because stewardship is about more than that; it’s about sharing all that we have with God and with the people of God. When we tithe money, it’s given in the context of what we have, which varies greatly from person to person; that 10% will make or break many a person I know, but for someone like Bill Gates or Warren Buffet, 10% won’t change their lifestyles one iota. We are not all equal when it comes to money; I can see how much more some people have than I do, and I can also see many who have a whole lot less. But we are all equal when it comes to time. I get 24 hours in a day, just as Bill Gates does, just as all of you do. And so how we spend this time is going to help determine exactly how we are asking God for things when we approach him in prayer.

So if we tithed our time, how would it look? All of us have 168 hours in a week (well, expect for this week); ten percent of that would come to 16, 17 hours a week. That’s a lot for most people to give back to God in purely spiritual or religious endeavors; that’s approaching priest and nun level. And too, we do need to get in eight or so hours of sleep, so what if we tithed from just our waking hours? Knock off 56 hours a week from our total, and we would still be needing to give to God 11 hours a week. But what about work; most of us have to work. Let’s assume a normal 40 hour work week for someone to support themselves and their dependents, if they have any; and say that more than 40 hours is normally a choice to make more money. Tithing ten percent of our waking, non-working hours would still come out to 7 hours a week. Now, consider what all we could do to fill that time, time that, once we decide to tithe it, we acknowledge belongs to God, not to us: Mass obligation, for sure; a Holy Hour, perhaps; rosaries, quiet time in the morning spent reading the Bible, choir practice, helping with projects for the Knights of Columbus even. Even if only half of us gave 5% of our waking, non-working hours, this parish would be transformed. All those things which it’s so hard to find time for, we have time once we dedicate a set amount of time to the giver of all time. When Bartimaeus was called to go to Jesus, he threw aside his cloak, *sprang up*, and went—sprang up, even in his blindness, not afraid of falling, not concerned with stumbling. How do we react when we are invited to an encounter with our Lord? Are we springing up, or finding excuses to just stay sitting there and let Jesus pass right by?

Bartimaeus could very easily have never been given his sight, if he had settled for merely collecting alms that day. And he would also have remained blind had he refused to get up, and go to Jesus when our Lord called for him. Bartimaeus asked for more from Jesus than what he was in the habit of asking for from everyone else; and because he took that risk, he received much more than he could ever have bargained for: he went past alms, asked for sight, and received faith, and became a follower of Christ. In the first reading, from the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, the

people of Israel are being called back to their home after a long, long exile. But they did not spend that exile sitting around, wistfully hoping that somehow things would work out; they actively turned back to God, converted, left behind the idolatrous ways that landed them in exile, and returned to their worship of the one true God. And so as they made their journey, they knew that they would not be able to hold on to their native land again if ever they settled for just resting on their laurels; this work of maintaining a good relationship with God would take effort, and it would demand their time, but in their estimation, it would be worth it. In today's responsorial psalm, we heard "the Lord has done great things for us, we are glad indeed." If we believe that God has done great things for us, why in the world would we ever hold back from him? May Bartimaeus, who took the risk of asking for more, move us to ask for more, by offering more effort to God. That time spent kneeling in front of the Blessed Sacrament or praying the rosary may gain us what we ask, but even more, it may open the door God wants us to open, from our side, so that he can bestow gifts upon us that we haven't even considered or imagined yet.

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