

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

We all appreciate all five of our senses. Who here can name them?

(sight, smell, taste, touch, and hearing).

While each of these senses is precious to us, our lives wouldn't be terribly altered if we were to lose some of them. For instance, if I smell onions cooking, I know I'm soon to enjoy a great meal or there are times when the scent of a flower is even more beautiful than the sight of it. But if I lost the sense of smell, I could still enjoy a great meal or the sight of a beautiful flower.

Similarly, if I lost the sense of taste, I would still know to eat when I was hungry. On the plus side, I might even eat broccoli if I didn't have to taste it.

Losing the sense of touch would be tough and even dangerous because you couldn't feel that something was too hot or too cold. But still you could adjust to the loss of the sense of touch.

Losing the ability to hear would have been a great loss in the pass, But, today, when no one listens to anyone anyway, you would easily get on in life by texting like everyone already does.

But losing the sense of sight, for most of us, would be a catastrophe. Certainly there are exceptional people like Ray Charles, Stevie Wonder, and Diane Schuur who overcame this terrible disability and still created beautiful music, but for most of us it would be the most fearful loss.

Unlike today when there are many agencies and forms of assistance for blind people, in the time of the man named Bartimaeus in our Gospel, there was no such help. He was on his own. No one would have hired a blind man. His family probably moved on without him because to have such a person in your family brought disgrace on the whole family. So Bartimaeus' only recourse was to sit at the gate of the town and beg people for the money he needed to live on. This particular day Bartimaeus probably thought would be a good day because a lot of pilgrims were on their way through his town of Jericho on the way to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. He probably figured they were good, religious people. Maybe they would be generous.

Then, all of a sudden, he hears that Jesus would be passing by. He must have heard how he had performed great signs and wonders in other places. Maybe, just maybe, this Jesus could help him too.

So Bartimaeus starts shouting, “Jesus, son of David, have pity on me. The people trying to crowd through the city gate told him to shut up, but he just shouted louder, “Son of David, have pity on me.”

Jesus hears his cry and stops. He says to his disciples, “Call him”.

Here it gets interesting. They say to him, “Take courage; get up, Jesus is calling you.” So the Gospel tells us that Bartimaeus “threw aside his cloak (which was probably his only possession), sprang up, and came to Jesus.” Jesus asks him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man replied, “Master, I want to see.” Jesus then told him, “Go your way; your faith has saved you.” And our Gospel ends telling us, “Immediately he received his sight and followed him on the way.”

When you consider that there was a mob of people around Jesus and a bigger crowd trying to push through the city gate, in his desperation, Bartimaeus really had to have been shouting out for Jesus to hear him. Considering how the crowds around him were probably mocking him, telling him to shut up, maybe even spitting on him, or kicking him, he must have been frightened for his life to shout even louder.

Perhaps that’s why the person who spoke to him said, “Take courage; get up, Jesus is calling you.”

I would like to submit for your consideration this morning, my dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ, when bombs can be constructed and mailed to perceived political enemies; when someone enters a synagogue to kill innocent worshippers; when it is suggested that the solution to mass shootings is to place armed guards in our schools and houses of worship; we suffer from far greater spiritual poverty and spiritual blindness than that of Bartimaeus.

The late Mother Teresa, now St. Teresa of Kolkutta, in speaking of the poverty that she found in America, called it “the poverty of alienation”, a far more devastating poverty than she experienced in India. That poverty manifests itself in the fear of the other—the other who looks different than me; the other that speaks a different language than me; the other who worships differently than me. It is that poverty that blinds us to the reality that we are all members of one race, the human race and we are all members of one family, God’s family, and we are all called to be there for each other, not against one another.

This may not be the worst of times, but it is a time of too much anger, too much hate, too much violence, born of our own spiritual poverty and spiritual blindness.

When he approached Jesus, the Lord asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?” Bartimaeus was quick to reply. He knew what he wanted. “Master, I want to see.” He knew that his poverty was the result of his blindness. If he could only see, he could overcome his poverty and brokenness.

We know that there are far too many guns in our country that all too often find themselves into the hands of people who are going to do harm to themselves or others. We know that our political discourse is full of anger and hate and falsehoods. We know that racism, sexism, and religious bias are in the air we breathe in this country. Yet, we are like the people in the crowd passing by Bartimaeus. We avert our eyes because we don’t want to be bothered or it’s not our problem. It is this spiritual blindness that is far more devastating than that of the blind beggar in the street.

Like Bartimaeus, we have to recognize our own poverty and blindness so that when Jesus calls us and asks us what we want him to do for us, we can answer as forthrightly as that blind man did, “Master, I want to see”. I want to see every man as my brother, every woman as my sister. I want to see how to overcome my fear of those who look differently than me, speak differently than me, believe differently than me. I want to see the perspective of those who see things differently than me. I want to see how I might quell angry voices and speak peace to those filled with hate. “Yes, Master, I want to see.”

If we approach Jesus with that same humility of Bartimaeus, he will surely say, “Go your way; your faith has saved you.” Like Bartimaeus, upon receiving the sight we ask for, we will not go anywhere else. We will follow Jesus on the way.

However, it all begins with humbly recognizing our own spiritual poverty and spiritual blindness that will allow us to cry out, “Jesus, Son of David, have pity on us. Son of David, have pity on us. Jesus, have pity on us.” When we do so, our Gospel today gives us the blessed assurance that, even in the face of our fears and with all the noise around us and with us, the Spirit of God within us will speak, “Take courage; get up, Jesus is calling you.”