

My Dear People of God,

Today we celebrate the Thirtieth Sunday of Ordinary Time (the Green Cycle), that means the liturgical year is winding to an end. In a few more weeks, we shall celebrate the Solemnity of Christ the King that winds up the liturgical year. Then we begin a new liturgical year, as we enter into the season of Advent.

The second reading today from the Letter to the Hebrews is one of the readings that I chose to read at my ordination to the priesthood. As you can imagine, it means a lot to me. Allow me therefore reflect upon it as we celebrate this Sunday. The reading opens by pointing out that *“every high priest is taken from among men and made their representative before God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.”* Indeed, like every priest, I did not fall from the sky! I was so to say, taken from the pew and brought to the sanctuary and given this profound and noble responsibility, to be a representative of God! The reading goes on to say: *“He is able to deal patiently with the ignorant and erring, for he himself is beset by weakness and so, for this reason, must make sin offerings for himself as well as for the people”* I am constantly reminded of my own journey of faith and I constantly pray that I grow in the virtue of patience. Finally, the reading points out that *“No one takes this honor upon himself but only when called by God just as Aaron was”*

This reading should remind all of us of the role of the priest as a mediator for the people of God. In our Catholic Tradition, the most important role of the priest is to act *“In persona Christi”* that is, in the person of Christ. So, he leads and shows the way. He does this by animating the faith of the people and by sharing in their pain, and joy. A few weeks ago, I was in my office, when a lady came in and requested that I lay hands on her because she had just been diagnosed with a terrible disease. She told she was not Catholic, but in her predicament, she had delved into Scripture and had read in the Bible that: any who is sick should go to the priests of the Church for prayer and anointing (*James 15:14ff*). She told me, that her Church does not have a priest. It only has pastors and preachers! I prayed for her and was profoundly touched by her visit. It was an amazing reminder of who I am and who I am called to be: your representative before God!

This also reminded me about St Augustine and his reflection on the priesthood as he celebrated the anniversary of ordination. He said to his people: *“I am fearful of what I am for you, but I draw strength from what I am with you. For you, I am a priest, and with you, I am a Christian...Help me by your prayers and your obedience to carry out these many serious and varied duties...”* (*Sermon 350, 1*). So, as a human being *“who lives in the limitations of weakness,”* every priest must pray for himself. He also needs prayers from the Christian community. He has to see in order to help the people of God see. This means that together as members of the Christian community, we all need God’s mercy, compassion, healing and liberation from the limitations of life. So confidently and constantly, we must all ask for this help from Christ our ultimate High Priest.

In the gospel reading, we hear the account of the healing of the blind man, Bartimaeus. My dear brothers and sisters, there are many forms of blindness. It may be physical blindness where our eyes cannot see any more, but it could also be blindness in our minds and hearts. We acknowledge this when we use expressions such as; *‘I was completely in the dark’*, or *‘It suddenly dawned on me’*, or *‘It was right there in front of me, but I couldn’t see it’!* The more

important sight is the sight of faith. It is possible that a blind person could even 'see' and have more faith than a sighted person!

The key lessons for us in this gospel reading are two: the first is perseverance in prayer, a theme that is common in Sacred Scripture. Bartimaeus would not give up calling out to Jesus for help even when everyone around him was trying to get him to keep quiet. Secondly, after being healed, Bartimaeus followed Jesus. He didn't just say, 'thank you Jesus for healing me' and walk away, instead he followed Jesus. Sadly, very often times, when God gives us what we ask, we move Him to the bottom of our priorities until we are in need again! Thank God Bartimaeus didn't do that.

Let us pray today for our priests, that they may be effective representatives for us before God and let us also pray that we may have the sight of faith.

God bless you.

Fr Simon Peter