



The Holy See

HOLY MASS FOR THE CLOSING OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI

Vatican Basilica

Sunday, 28 October 2012

[\[Video\]](#)

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*Dear Brother Bishops,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

The miracle of the healing of blind Bartimaeus comes at a significant point in the structure of Saint Mark's Gospel. It is situated at the end of the section on the "journey to Jerusalem", that is, Jesus' last pilgrimage to the Holy City, for the Passover, in which he knows that his passion, death and resurrection await him. In order to ascend to Jerusalem from the Jordan valley, Jesus passes through Jericho, and the meeting with Bartimaeus occurs as he leaves the city – in the evangelist's words, "as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great multitude" (10:46). This is the multitude that soon afterwards would acclaim Jesus as Messiah on his entry into Jerusalem. Sitting and begging by the side of the road was Bartimaeus, whose name means "son of Timaeus", as the evangelist tells us. The whole of Mark's Gospel is a journey of faith, which develops gradually under Jesus' tutelage. The disciples are the first actors on this journey of discovery, but there are also other characters who play an important role, and Bartimaeus is one of them. His is the last miraculous healing that Jesus performs before his passion, and it is no accident that it should be that of a blind person, someone whose eyes have lost the light. We know from other texts too that the state of blindness has great significance in the Gospels. It represents man who needs God's light, the light of faith, if he is to know reality truly and to walk the path of life. It is essential to acknowledge one's blindness, one's need for this light, otherwise

one could remain blind for ever (cf. *Jn* 9:39-41).

Bartimaeus, then, at that strategic point of Mark's account, is presented as a model. He was not blind from birth, but he lost his sight. He represents man who has lost the light and knows it, but has not lost hope: he knows how to seize the opportunity to encounter Jesus and he entrusts himself to him for healing. Indeed, when he hears that the Master is passing along the road, he cries out: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" (*Mk* 10:47), and he repeats it even louder (v. 48). And when Jesus calls him and asks what he wants from him, he replies: "Master, let me receive my sight!" (v. 51). Bartimaeus represents man aware of his pain and crying out to the Lord, confident of being healed. His simple and sincere plea is exemplary, and indeed – like that of the publican in the Temple: "God, be merciful to me a sinner" (*Lk* 18:13) – it has found its way into the tradition of Christian prayer. In the encounter with Christ, lived with faith, Bartimaeus regains the light he had lost, and with it the fullness of his dignity: he gets back onto his feet and resumes the journey, which from that moment has a guide, Jesus, and a path, the same that Jesus is travelling. The evangelist tells us nothing more about Bartimaeus, but in him he shows us what discipleship is: following Jesus "along the way" (v. 52), in the light of faith.

Saint Augustine, in one of his writings, makes a striking comment about the figure of Bartimaeus, which can be interesting and important for us today. He reflects on the fact that in this case Mark indicates not only the name of the person who is healed, but also the name of his father, and he concludes that "Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, had fallen from some position of great prosperity, and was now regarded as an object of the most notorious and the most remarkable wretchedness, because, in addition to being blind, he had also to sit begging. And this is also the reason, then, why Mark has chosen to mention only the one whose restoration to sight acquired for the miracle a fame as widespread as was the notoriety which the man's misfortune itself had gained" (*On the Consensus of the Evangelists*, 2, 65, 125: *PL* 34, 1138). Those are Saint Augustine's words.

This interpretation, that Bartimaeus was a man who had fallen from a condition of "great prosperity", causes us to think. It invites us to reflect on the fact that our lives contain precious riches that we can lose, and I am not speaking of material riches here. From this perspective, Bartimaeus could represent those who live in regions that were evangelized long ago, where the light of faith has grown dim and people have drifted away from God, no longer considering him relevant for their lives. These people have therefore lost a precious treasure, they have "fallen" from a lofty dignity – not financially or in terms of earthly power, but in a Christian sense – their lives have lost a secure and sound direction and they have become, often unconsciously, beggars for the meaning of existence. They are the many in need of a new evangelization, that is, a new encounter with Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God (cf. *Mk* 1:1), who can open their eyes afresh and teach them the path. It is significant that the liturgy puts the Gospel of Bartimaeus before us today, as we conclude the Synodal Assembly on the New Evangelization. This biblical passage has something particular to say to us as we grapple with the urgent need to proclaim Christ anew in places where the light of faith has been weakened, in places where the fire of God is more like

smouldering cinders, crying out to be stirred up, so that they can become a living flame that gives light and heat to the whole house.

The new evangelization applies to the whole of the Church's life. It applies, in the first instance, to the ordinary pastoral ministry that must be more animated by the fire of the Spirit, so as to inflame the hearts of the faithful who regularly take part in community worship and gather on the Lord's day to be nourished by his word and by the bread of eternal life. I would like here to highlight three pastoral themes that have emerged from the Synod. The first concerns the *sacraments of Christian initiation*. It has been reaffirmed that appropriate catechesis must accompany preparation for Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. The importance of Confession, the sacrament of God's mercy, has also been emphasized. This sacramental journey is where we encounter the Lord's call to holiness, addressed to all Christians. In fact it has often been said that the real protagonists of the new evangelization are the saints: they speak a language intelligible to all through the example of their lives and their works of charity.

Secondly, the new evangelization is essentially linked to the *Missio ad Gentes*. The Church's task is to evangelize, to proclaim the message of salvation to those who do not yet know Jesus Christ. During the Synod, it was emphasized that there are still many regions in Africa, Asia and Oceania whose inhabitants await with lively expectation, sometimes without being fully aware of it, the first proclamation of the Gospel. So we must ask the Holy Spirit to arouse in the Church a new missionary dynamism, whose protagonists are, in particular, pastoral workers and the lay faithful. Globalization has led to a remarkable migration of peoples. So the first proclamation is needed even in countries that were evangelized long ago. All people have a right to know Jesus Christ and his Gospel: and Christians, all Christians – priests, religious and lay faithful – have a corresponding duty to proclaim the Good News.

A third aspect concerns *the baptized whose lives do not reflect the demands of Baptism*. During the Synod, it was emphasized that such people are found in all continents, especially in the most secularized countries. The Church is particularly concerned that they should encounter Jesus Christ anew, rediscover the joy of faith and return to religious practice in the community of the faithful. Besides traditional and perennially valid pastoral methods, the Church seeks to adopt new ones, developing new language attuned to the different world cultures, proposing the truth of Christ with an attitude of dialogue and friendship rooted in God who is Love. In various parts of the world, the Church has already set out on this path of pastoral creativity, so as to bring back those who have drifted away or are seeking the meaning of life, happiness and, ultimately, God. We may recall some important city missions, the "Courtyard of the Gentiles", the continental mission, and so on. There is no doubt that the Lord, the Good Shepherd, will abundantly bless these efforts which proceed from zeal for his Person and his Gospel.

Dear brothers and sisters, Bartimaeus, on regaining his sight from Jesus, joined the crowd of disciples, which must certainly have included others like him, who had been healed by the Master.

New evangelizers are like that: people who have had the experience of being healed by God, through Jesus Christ. And characteristic of them all is a joyful heart that cries out with the Psalmist: "What marvels the Lord worked for us: indeed we were glad" (*Ps* 125:3). Today, we too turn to the Lord Jesus, *Redemptor hominis* and *lumen gentium*, with joyful gratitude, making our own a prayer of Saint Clement of Alexandria: "until now I wandered in the hope of finding God, but since you enlighten me, O Lord, I find God through you and I receive the Father from you, I become your coheir, since you did not shrink from having me for your brother. Let us put away, then, let us put away all blindness to the truth, all ignorance: and removing the darkness that obscures our vision like fog before the eyes, let us contemplate the true God ...; since a light from heaven shone down upon us who were buried in darkness and imprisoned in the shadow of death, [a light] purer than the sun, sweeter than life on this earth" (*Protrepticus*, 113: 2 – 114:1). Amen.

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