

My Brothers and Sisters,

Like so many passages in Scripture, we can read today's Gospel from two points of view.

We can simply read the Gospel literally. Bartimaeus was physically blind. Because he believed in Jesus, Jesus restored his sight. Bartimaeus then followed Jesus. Like all the physical miracles of Jesus, it witnessed to his divinity, confirmed his teaching, and fulfilled the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament, calling us to a deeper faith in Jesus.

However, we can also read this Gospel on a more profound level as speaking to our own experience. In his book *And Now I See...: A Theology of Transformation*, Bishop Robert Barron offers an insightful analysis of this miracle.

To understand this miracle in all its richness, we first have to look at the defining verses of Mark's Gospel, Mark 1:15-16: "*This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.*" In Mark's Gospel, these are the very first words out of Jesus' mouth after his baptism. However, the word *repent* is not a good translation of the Greek word *metanoiete*. When we think of repentance, we think about a change of behavior. *Metanoiete* comes from two words: *meta*, which means *beyond*, and *nous*, which means *mind* or *spirit*. *Metanoiete*, then, means to *go beyond the mind that you have*. In simplest language, it means to see in a new way.

According to Bishop Barron's interpretation, the kingdom is Jesus himself, in whom the divine and human come together. Jesus is the Kingdom of God come into the world to transform the world. We are called to open our eyes and see the coming together of the divine and the human in Jesus and, through Jesus, in us. To believe in the gospel, or good news, is to find the center of our lives in God's unconditional love, to trust in God, to entrust our lives and our futures to God and God's love revealed in Jesus Christ.

The blindness of Bartimaeus is not only physical blindness but spiritual blindness, the blindness of the soul. He is asking to be freed of this blindness. He asks to see in a new way. He throws off his cloak, symbolizing his throwing off his old patterns of life and ways of seeing. Because Jesus never forces his love on anyone, Jesus asks Bartimaeus what he wants him to do for him. Bartimaeus answers, "I want to see." Jesus responds, "Go, your faith has saved you." Because he came to Jesus, because he trusted Jesus, because he was willing to entrust his life and his future to Jesus, he could see in a new way. The story ends with Bartimaeus following Jesus up the road, in other words, becoming a disciple of Jesus.

My brothers and sisters, what are the consequences of this new way of seeing and believing? I think there are two. First, this new way of seeing and believing frees us from fear. As we know, there are four universal fears: fear of failure, fear of rejection, fear of pain, and fear of death. Second, because of sin, we humans tend to operate out of a scarcity model. In other words, I have to get what I can because there may not be enough to go around. This new way of seeing and believing frees us from this model, frees us from the need to always take everything we can, frees us to give, to love. The freedom from fear and the freedom to give reconciles us with God and others, enables us to live in harmony and peace with God and others.