

Homily 30th Sunday of the Year B

Today we reflect on our status as God's people and the implication for an unending offering of the sacrifice of prayer. What a timely message for us as God's people! It is timely, particularly in the light of the challenges we face today. Many of us are hurting and in desperate need of God's intervention. Our First Reading ([Jer 31:7-9](#)) gives us a word of faith. It says our salvation is at hand. "Thus says the LORD: Shout with joy for Jacob, exult at the head of the nations; proclaim your praise and say: The LORD has delivered his people ... I will gather them from the ends of the world, with the blind and the lame in their midst ... but I will console them and guide them; I will lead them to brooks of water, on a level road, so that none shall stumble. For I am a father to Israel, Ephraim is my first-born."

Beloved, you're probably wondering how the above promise applies to us. The Church is the New Israel. We're Jacob; we're Ephraim, God's first-born sons and daughters of the New Covenant. God's plan was to make his people into a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod 19:6). That plan was realized through the New Testament Church, the Catholic Church. Peter, the First Pope, declares, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." (1Pet 2:9).

But how did our status as a priestly people come about? This is the point of our Second Reading ([Heb 5:1-6](#)). Our status is a privileged one; we did not merit it: "No one takes this honor upon himself but only when called by God". It is a gift on a platter of gold. We were formally established as priests (whether as Ministerial Priests or the Common Priesthood of the Laity) through Christ the Eternal High priest. The very function of a priest is "to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins". Simply put, we are to offer the Sacrifice of Prayer of which the Mass is the preeminent expression. At Mass, all baptized Catholics are celebrants; the priest is only the chief celebrant. The Catholic priest is "taken from among men and made their representative before God". He leads the faithful to pray: "Pray brethren that my sacrifice and yours be acceptable to God the Father almighty". We respond, "May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for the praise and glory of his name, and for our good and the good of all his Church."

See how the Author to the Hebrews explains our new relationship, our priestly and first-born status, in Christ our Eternal High priest:

[Y]ou have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem,

and to innumerable angels in festal gathering and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel (Heb 12:22-24).

The point here is that in the Church we truly experience our Mount Zion, a "holy ground" (Exod 3:5; Acts 7:33) where the communion of saints (the heavenly and the earthly) unites in prayer and adoration. Jesus is not just passing through; he's the High priest himself. Active participation is stressed. Nobody is an observer or a spectator; we're the assembly of the first-borns in Christ taking part in a sacrifice that pleads more insistently than any other. Through the ceaseless offering of this living and perfect sacrifice of praise, we truly realize the words of Christ, "Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (Matt 7:7). Do not become weary of praying and worshipping.

The lesson in the Gospel passage today ([Mk 10:46-52](#)) is never give up. First, notice that there was a sizable crowd there but only "Bartimaeus, a blind man" received attention. Although he was naturally disadvantaged through his blindness, the obstacle of the crowd, and some hostile people yelling at him; but he persevered. He seized the opportunity; he took it by force: As soon as he heard "it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, son of David, have pity on me." "Many rebuked him, telling him to be silent." But he did not give up; he persevered in prayer, took it by force and received God's favor.

Beloved, just like in the time of Bartimaeus, we have "a crowd" of daunting challenges today. How many oppressive and intimidating "crowds of liberals" are out there! How many will give you dirty looks because you tried to make the sign of the cross in public! How many criticize our Catholic prayers, Eucharistic expositions and the Mass! My dearest friends, just like Bartimaeus, who "kept calling out all the more" let us persevere all the more. Scripture tells us, "From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and men of violence take it by force" (Matt 11:12). Beloved, take your opportunity by force! "By your endurance you will gain your lives" (Luke 21:19).