

# QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY

(Missale Romanum, 1962)

“JESUS, SON OF DAVID, HAVE PITY ON ME”

My brothers and sisters, as the Season of Lent approaches, today’s Gospel provides a glimpse of the sorrows of Jesus with an announcement of His Passion: ‘The Son of Man ... shall be delivered to the Gentiles, and shall be mocked and scourged and spit upon, ... and they will put Him to death; and on the third day He will rise again.’

While this message, the ancient *Kerygma* (or Good News), is so central to what we believe as Christians, it was very foreign to the ears of Christ’s Apostles, who ‘understood none of these things.’ In other words, the Twelve were blinded at the time from knowledge of the true nature of our Lord’s mission, as given to Him by the Father.

It is in the context of Christ’s prediction of His own Passion and the Apostle’s blindness that a man is cured of his blindness. Blindness was a common affliction in the biblical world and was sometimes considered as a punishment for wickedness. Blindness was ‘used in the New Testament as a metaphor for the spiritual darkness of unbelief or lack of spiritual perception.’<sup>i</sup>

In commenting on today’s Gospel, St John Chrysostom says:

‘Blind is the soul that needs to have the use of its eyes restored to it: blind is the soul that cannot discern the wonders of [God’s] Law: blind is the soul that cannot see that there is a world to come: blind is the soul that beholds the Body of Christ, but cannot discern His divinity.’<sup>ii</sup>

Although the blind man of Jericho was not able to see on a physical level, he was very alert and perceptive to what was going on around him. While the crowds told him that it was Jesus of Nazareth who was passing by, it was the perceptivity of his soul that led him to cry out using the Messianic title: ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’

Pope Benedict stated that the healing of the blind man near Jericho:

‘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)... [The blind man] 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.’<sup>iii</sup>

The blind man ‘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... it has found its way into the tradition of Christian prayer. In the encounter with Christ, lived with faith, [the blind man] 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.’<sup>iv</sup>

For those of us who are entering into this Holy Season of Lent, the blind man gives us an example of humility and persistence in prayer. May our prayer be the same: ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.’

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<sup>i</sup> *Catholic Bible Dictionary*, 2009, Scott Hahn, General Editor, Doubleday, NY, p. 123.

<sup>ii</sup> *The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers*, Vol I, St Ignatius Press, San Francisco, p. 416

<sup>iii</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, October 29, 2012, Concluding Mass of the XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the New Evangelization, as found at <https://zenit.org/articles/pope-benedict-the-new-evangelization-applies-to-the-whole-of-the-church-s-life/>

<sup>iv</sup> *Ibid.*