

8th Thursday in Ordinary Time Cycle I/St. Katherine Drexel
March 3, 2011
Fr. Joe Bambenek
Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, Carmel, IN

Sirach 42:15-25

Psalm 33

Mark 10:46-52

In today's gospel we hear what occurred as Jesus embarked upon his last journey in the Gospel of Mark. Following in the geographic footprints in which Joshua led the People of Israel when they came to conquer the Promised Land over a millennia before Him, Jesus leaves Jericho and heads for Jerusalem on His conquest mission: to face His crucifixion and then to give us life through His resurrection. As Jesus leaves Jericho, He encounters Bartimaeus, a blind man; a blind man of faith. A blind man whose faith overcomes the discouragement, the screams of those who did not want him to bother Jesus. The screams of those who wanted to keep Bartimaeus as he was. The screams of those who wanted to keep him in his blindness. This part of the story reminds us that when we seek God's healing, when we seek to follow His direction in our lives; sometimes there are other screams in our lives that seek to block us. Sometimes those screams come from people who like us as we are and don't want us to change. Sometimes those screams come from within: from our fears; from our comfort with our lifestyle, however good it might be; and from our comfort with the sins we know.

As I reflected upon today's gospel, I came to realize how fitting is its setting for the reason that I am here to celebrate Mass with you today. As Fr. Richard mentioned at the start of Mass, my name is Fr. Joe Bambenek and I was ordained as a priest of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis last May. I have come here today to celebrate with you a Mass of Thanksgiving for my ordination. The reason I am here is that between 2002 and 2005, and especially once the adoration chapel was dedicated, one that I find very special, I came to Our Lady of Mt. Carmel to pray with some frequency. Most often, my trips here were to pray in that chapel, as I mentioned, one that I think is among the most impressive in which I have ever prayed. In those days it was also common for me to attend one of the morning Masses here before I started a day's worth of business meetings a few miles southeast of here, at the Midwest ISO. During those years, I would travel to Carmel about once per week. Also, at that time, my life resembled today's gospel reading in a certain way. When I made those business trips, I knew I would be leaving my job for the priesthood. In fact, by the time I started to frequent Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, my employer knew it too and I was taking seminary prerequisite classes. You could say that during those years, I was on my way with Jesus on the last stretch to Jerusalem, heading toward the death of my life in the world as I knew it. The death of a good job and the financial security that went with it. The death of the possibility of getting married. All with the resurrection hope of the priesthood. What I am about to share I do so because it offers a spiritual insight on when the screams often happen in our lives, at those times when we seek to be healed of our blindnesses and follow Him. It was on my very last business trip to Carmel I received a surprise email that easily could have been the biggest challenge to me renouncing marriage.

But thankfully, in part due to the ability to come here and pray, and to receive the strength and encouragement that comes from receiving Jesus in the Eucharist, I was able to persevere in the face of those challenges in the face of those screams that called for me to remain in the life that I was living.

So it is for that reason I come here to celebrate; to say thank you to Our Lady of Mt Carmel parish and its people for celebrating multiple daily Masses. To say thank you for having enough dedicated volunteers to maintain a perpetual adoration chapel: from those who do the work behind the scenes to those who commit to praying weekly. Given that I was fed here in Word and through the Eucharist, celebrating this Mass with you seemed like the best way to express my gratitude for the role that Our Lady of Mt. Carmel played in my perseverance to the priesthood.

But I suspect that I am not alone. And I encourage the young knights here to pay special attention to this. Perhaps today there are some of you who God is calling to walk with Him to Jerusalem, to die to your current way of life so as to be an instrument of His life, His forgiveness, and His love in the world. Maybe He is calling one or two of you to the priesthood or religious life. He is likely calling more of you to some form of deeper service of Him and His people. My message today is that of the gospel reading: let us be like Bartimeus the blind man. Let us ask Jesus to heal whatever is in our lives that keeping us from being able to joyfully follow Him to Jerusalem. Yes, it will unfortunately include suffering, even crucifixion perhaps of certain familiar aspects of life, but doing so allows us to ultimately to rise with Him to new life in this world, and ultimately, to eternal life in heaven.