

30th SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME (Cycle B)

October 29, 2006 – Deacon Bill Nourse, Ed.D.

INTRODUCTION

**“You are a priest forever
according to the order of Melchizedek.”**

There’s something about the word “forever” in that verse that I’ve always found a little unsettling. When I was a kid, I always heard it in the context of ordained Catholic priests. It was hard for me to grasp the idea that someone could make a “forever” commitment like that. It was only as I got older that I began to explore the deeper meaning of that verse. The author of Hebrews is quoting Psalm 110. This is the only time Psalm 110 is quoted in the New Testament.

“Yours is princely power from the day of your birth. In holy splendor before the daystar, like the dew I begot you.”

The LORD has sworn and will not waver: “Like Melchizedek you are a priest forever.”

Well, OK. But who was this person Melchizedek? To find that out, we have to go back to the Book of Genesis. Even that doesn’t tell us much.

A war was on, and Abram's nephew Lot had been captured. When Abram found out about it, he went out with his entourage and rescued his nephew. When he got back, his friends came out to greet him. Then . . .

Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine, and being a priest of God Most High, he blessed Abram with these words:

Blessed be Abram by God Most High, the creator of heaven and earth; And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your foes into your hand."

That’s about it. Genesis tells us nothing about where Melchizedek came from, or what happened to him after that. Nothing about his ancestry, birth, or death. He just sort of passes through the scene and then is gone. Even stranger, he was both a king and a priest, which wasn’t the way it worked in those days.

If our reading from Hebrews continued for a couple of more chapters, we'd hear a little more:

His name first means righteous king, and he was also "king of Salem," that is, king of peace. Without father, mother, or ancestry, without beginning of days or end of life, thus made to resemble the Son of God, he remains a priest forever.

Of course, we now see Melchizedek as a prefiguring of Christ, representing a priesthood that is unique and eternal.

In Old Testament tradition, the high priest was identified with the people. The high priest was guilty of personal sin, just as the people were. If we look back at last week's reading from Hebrews . . .

**Since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens,
Jesus, the Son of God,
let us hold fast to our confession.
For we do not have a high priest
who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses,
but one who has similarly been tested in every way,
yet without sin.**

Although Jesus was Son of God, His destiny as a human being was to learn obedience by accepting the suffering he had to endure. Because of his perfection through this experience of human suffering, he is the cause of salvation for all, a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

MOVE

Today's first reading describes a joyful return from exile. When you think about it, repentance and conversion and turning away from sin is a kind of a return from exile.

We take a lot of wrong turns in life. In a way, it's kind of like driving a car to someplace we've never been before. We're confident we're not lost, but it's kind of like "vuja de" – the feeling that none of this looks familiar at all. We're too humiliated to ask for directions. Well, OK, we're lost, but we're making really good time. When we finally get back on the right road, it really feels good. Almost liberating.

Liberation from sin is like that. We rediscover the joy we had almost forgotten amid the cares and worries of life. We are continuously called to conversion, but most of the time we try to ignore the call. Conversion is a return from exile.

MOVE

In today's Gospel, we are reminded that Jesus calls everyone, the blind, the weak, the great, the humble, the broken. He fills them with the joy and consolation that only God can give. It's there waiting for us, but we have to participate. God takes the initiative, but we have to respond.

Although he was sinless, Jesus can sympathize with sinners, because of his own experience of the trials and weakness of human nature, especially fear of death. He understands what we suffer because of his earthly experience.

MOVE

Today's Gospel is the story of every soul. We all need Christ to pass by our way. He always does, but for each person in a different way. The blind man is one of us, on the path of faith. He doesn't see Jesus. He hears about him. The things that are going on around him tell him that Jesus is near. He responds and expresses his faith.

It's interesting that those around him try to shut him up and try to keep him from Jesus. Don't some of the people around us try to do that to us, too? Like Bartimaeus, we have to persevere against the many voices which try to silence us. Bartimaeus has courage. He's not concerned about what others say and think. He perseveres in his openness to God.

MOVE

Because of his perseverance, Jesus openly calls him. Now those around him realize he's being called, and encourage him, and help him – "Have courage, get up . . . Throw away your cloak." He is called to take off the old man he was and put on the new man he will become.

"What do you want?" Jesus asks. Bartimaeus knows what he wants. He wants to see. That's what we all want.

Be careful what you pray for. St. Catherine of Siena said, “There are more tears shed over answered prayers than over unanswered prayers.” I’ve often thought that if God really wanted to punish me, he would have answered some of my past prayers. When Jesus asks us, “What do you want?” a lot can turn on our response.

MOVE

Following God’s will always means getting up and moving on. We may not know what the destination is. We may have to leave things behind, things that are really hard to let go of. Abandoning our will to God is not easy.

As time goes by, it sure doesn’t get any easier. We live in a culture of death. The world around us is constantly trying to redefine what God has defined. It’s a difficult time to be a disciple . . . but in a way, there’s never been a better time.

As we go through life, Christ passes by each of us. He offers us the light of faith, but something more. Bartimaeus didn’t just receive his sight and sit back down by the side of the road to watch the world go by. He followed Jesus. Even if we accept the gift of faith, we can’t just stay where we are, blessed with vision but only taking it all in. The call is to get up and follow him. And this means continual conversion. It means a constantly deepening vision of our prayer life, of our sacramental life, of our relationships with others.

He has put the all-important question to us. Perhaps we have already given the answer he wants to hear. Perhaps not. It is up to each of us to decide before God if we have and if we are being faithful to our answer. Further, Christ wants to pass by many others along their roads. He places each one of us there in his place as his apostles. We are entrusted with the question. If we have really answered it, then we will be able to ask it of others, for we are his.

READINGS

Reading 1

Jer 31:7-9

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,
the remnant of Israel.
Behold, I will bring them back
from the land of the north;
I will gather them from the ends of the world,
with the blind and the lame in their midst,
the mothers and those with child;
they shall return as an immense throng.
They departed in tears,
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.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 126:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6

R. (3) The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.

When the LORD brought back the captives of Zion,
we were like men dreaming.

Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with rejoicing.

R. The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.

Then they said among the nations,
"The LORD has done great things for them."

The LORD has done great things for us;
we are glad indeed.

R. The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.

Restore our fortunes, O LORD,
like the torrents in the southern desert.

Those that sow in tears
shall reap rejoicing.

R. The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.

Although they go forth weeping,
carrying the seed to be sown,
They shall come back rejoicing,

carrying their sheaves.

R. The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.

Reading II

Heb 5:1-6

Brothers and sisters:

Every high priest is taken from among men
and made their representative before God,
to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.

He is able to deal patiently with the ignorant and erring,
for he himself is beset by weakness
and so, for this reason, must make sin offerings for himself
as well as for the people.

No one takes this honor upon himself
but only when called by God,
just as Aaron was.

In the same way,
it was not Christ who glorified himself in becoming high priest,
but rather the one who said to him:

You are my son:
this day I have begotten you;
just as he says in another place:
You are a priest forever
according to the order of Melchizedek.

Gospel

Mk 10:46-52

As Jesus was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a sizable crowd,
Bartimaeus, a blind man, the son of Timaeus,
sat by the roadside begging.

On hearing that it was Jesus of Nazareth,
he began to cry out and say,

"Jesus, son of David, have pity on me."

And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent.

But he kept calling out all the more,

"Son of David, have pity on me."

Jesus stopped and said, "Call him."

So they called the blind man, saying to him,

"Take courage; get up, Jesus is calling you."

He threw aside his cloak, sprang up, and came to Jesus.

Jesus said to him in reply, "What do you want me to do for you?"

The blind man replied to him, "Master, I want to see."

Jesus told him, "Go your way; your faith has saved you."

Immediately he received his sight
and followed him on the way.