

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time
October 28, 2018
Fr. Rick Lorenz

Reflection

Father Paul was appointed as parochial administrator last year. He serves as our pastor, leading us to God. Within his mandate, Archbishop Prendergast gave him a specific task: to raise up missionary disciples for the new evangelization. We're called to share the good news with our neighbours, especially those Catholics who have drifted from the Church. Jeremiah states our mission with these words: "Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, "Save, O Lord, your people, the remnant of Israel."

Michael Dopp is a well-known speaker within the new evangelization. He spoke to the parish in August, giving us ideas on how to pursue our mission; how to raise up missionary disciples. Part of his presentation was something called "The Five Thresholds of Conversion." Imagine a staircase with five stairs. Normally you can climb it without any problem. But now imagine you've just started jogging again, after a year sitting on the couch. Your legs hurt! When you have to climb the stairs, you notice each and every step. The thresholds of conversion are like these stairs. We're on one of the steps. Someone who has gone to church their whole life might still be on the first step.

Jer 31:7-9
Ps 126
Heb 5:1-6
Mk 10:46-52

Someone outside these walls - who stopped going to church twenty years ago - they might be in the middle. Our goal is to climb the last step, to become a disciple.

In today's Gospel, Bartimaeus climbs these steps; he passes through the thresholds of conversion. He has already received the gift of faith. It gives him an **initial trust** in Jesus. This initial trust is the first threshold of conversion. He was sitting by the roadside, but "When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!'" He proclaims Jesus as the "Son of David," using a messianic title. He knows Jesus to be the Messiah, and he trusts him. But that trust does not make him a disciple.

From initial trust he grows to **spiritual curiosity**, the second threshold of conversion. "Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!'" Despite the warnings of the crowd, he is intensely aware of Jesus, and cries out to him. But that curiosity does not make him a disciple.

The Gospel reminds us that Jesus is the key to conversion. "Jesus stood still and said, 'Call him here.'" Jesus is the one who calls us, but he works through others. By the power of the Holy Spirit, he works through the Church. And when we embrace our mission, he works through us. "They called the blind man, saying to him, 'Take heart; get up, he is calling you.'"

Jesus calls through others, but each step requires a free decision. "So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus."

Spiritual openness follows spiritual curiosity. It is the third threshold of conversion. With it, one is open to the possibility of change. Bartimaeus had been wearing a cloak. It marked him as blind, as a beggar; but he threw it off. It no longer fit. He is open to change, to a new identity. But that openness does not make him a disciple.

After spiritual openness, comes **spiritual seeking**. The fourth threshold of conversion is a shift from being passive to active; from acknowledging the possibility of change, to searching after knowledge and trying to determine the will of God. "So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus." He goes to Jesus, seeking mercy, but would he follow him? His seeking does not make him a disciple.

The fifth and final threshold of conversion is **intentional discipleship**. It's a decision to follow Jesus. For us, the decision comes after prayer made in faith. Jesus grants us our greatest good. He knows what we need. We pray to find out what he wants. But for Bartimaeus, the decision to follow Jesus came after a petition: "My teacher, let me see again." It came after a miracle: "Go; your faith has made you well." At this point, Bartimaeus could have left Jesus, restored and made whole. I suppose that happened to the many nameless figures of the Gospels whom Jesus had cured. They were left standing on the different thresholds of conversion.

But Bartimaeus wanted more. He wanted to be a disciple. "Immediately the man regained his sight and followed Jesus on the way."

It's good to spend time thinking where we are on the thresholds of conversion. We're called to become disciples, and even missionary saints. I've given you a lot to think about. This homily will be available on our website, and will be printed in *Knight-Lite* next December. You might even read the book *Forming Intentional Disciples* by Sherry Weddell. In the universal call to holiness, we always strive through the narrow door to become more. But in this Eucharist, we give thanks for what grace has already achieved, through baptism and the sacraments. "The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy."