

OUR LADY, STAR OF THE SEA, WEYMOUTH
HOMILY FOR THE THIRTIETH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR (B)
25th OCTOBER 2009.

Let's imagine that we are witnessing today's Gospel for ourselves.

There are three places to be as we leave Jericho.

One place is with Jesus and his disciples, the second place is in the large crowd, and the third place is with Bartimaeus outside the crowd, right on the edge of the action.

It's like three circles – Jesus and his disciples in the centre, the crowd in the middle forming a circle around Jesus and the third circle is right around the edge of the crowd.

We can imagine that the crowd is trying to hear what Jesus is saying to his disciples, but because they are on a journey they are walking steadily and there is a lot of background noise, so the crowd have to strain to hear what Jesus is saying.

Then imagine the loud shout from outside their circle, "Son of David, Jesus, have pity on me."

The crowd tell him to be quiet. Understandably they are annoyed because they are trying to listen to Jesus and this outsider is interrupting. They might miss something important.

Then imagine the amazement of everyone present when Jesus called Bartimaeus to him.

This meant that Bartimaeus was led from the outer circle to the centre circle because Jesus called him in. He became the centre of Jesus' attention. Jesus ignored the crowd for the moment. We can imagine that he returned his attention to them once Bartimaeus has been cured.

Now let's transfer the scene to St. Joseph's Church, Weymouth.

Let's imagine that after receiving Holy Communion at Mass, before the deacon puts the ciborium back in the tabernacle, Jesus appears in bodily form just as he did to the disciples immediately after his resurrection. He tells us that he has things to say to us. Father Stephen puts away the notices for the week and we all listen to Jesus. It's a fine day so Jesus says "Let's go out for a walk. I can talk as we walk." So out we go. We expect to turn right and go towards the sea, but Jesus turns left towards Abbotsbury Road and we all follow. We are totally focused on Jesus. We don't want to miss a word that he says.

So off we go along Abbotsbury Road, clustering around Jesus straining to hear what he is saying.

Then just as we are passing the entrance to the Rodwell Trail elderly man dirty old clothes and with a beer can in his hand shouts: "Jesus, have pity on me." What would we do?

Would *we* be so annoyed with his interruption that we are angry with him and tell him to keep quiet? Or would we immediately turn our attention him and lead him to Jesus?

There is no doubt what Jesus would do. Jesus would stop and say, “Call him here”.

When the man reached him Jesus would ask: “What do you want me to do for you?” and whatever was good for the man Jesus would do.

Then and only then would he return his attention to us and continue his conversation with us.

If we look around we might see the man from outside inside with us.

Jesus excludes no one. He ignores no one’s need. The neediest get his attention first.

Jesus does not take bodily form after Mass. His Ascension tells us not to expect it, but he is still present with us in our homes, in our Parish and in the Universal Church.

As good Catholics we will want to focus our attention on him, to hear what he is saying to us throughout the week. We will want to meditate on Holy Scripture to pray regularly but what if we are interrupted? What if the phone rings? Do we answer it? The caller may have a greater need than our need to listen to Jesus at that precise moment. Perhaps we should think of Bartimaeus and answer the phone. If the call is not important we can ask the caller to wait.

As good Catholics we want to celebrate Mass worthily with good liturgy and a good environment in Church. We want to pray our common devotions together, to hold our prayer groups and house groups. We want everything organised so that we can function as Catholics in an orderly way.

But what if there are people outside our circle crying out “Jesus, have pity on me”. Should we not respond to their needs quickly? Jesus did.

Today’s Gospel warns us individually and as a Church not to become so engrossed in prayer and liturgy and devotions that we fail to notice and respond to the needs of people outside. If we continue thinking only about what we are doing in church and ignore what is needed outside we may find that Jesus has turned his attention to those in greater need of healing.

Rev Geoff Carey