

BIBLICAL PAGES

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**Jesus,
a man of His time and space,
shows us our true and full humanity**

**Lectio n° 2
Let us listen, in order to stop;
let us stop, in order to listen**

Introduction

A cry, a stop along the road to Jerusalem, a relationship used as a symbol by St Mark. Here Jesus listens to his interlocutor, to be at his service, as at many other times in the gospels. The encounter is based on reciprocal listening: listening to Jesus' footsteps, on one side; listening to the cry, on the other. This listening will change the life of someone, in the midst of all those who cannot see – among whom even the most faithful disciples must be numbered – and of those who reject the calling to a new life.

Where will this second Lectio on Jesus' humanity lead us to? Which side of our own humanity will it make us focus on? In which mirror will we be made to look? You may have guessed that the subject of this Lectio will be the episode of Bartimaeus, from the Gospel of St Mark. Of course we could see ourselves in Bartimaeus and label the whole thing as one of Jesus' healings. But is it just a healing? Maybe this time we will be able to discover... We ourselves are called to relate to Jesus. We, like Jesus, are called to listen to what is the focus of someone else's life – as well as of our selves – as the key of Life.

Let us invoke the Holy Spirit

God our Father,
send Your Holy Spirit upon us,
that He may get rid of the noise of our words,
that He may let the silence of listening reign in us,
that He may accompany Your Word
from our ears to our hearts:
thus we shall meet Jesus Christ
and we shall know His love.
He lives and reigns for ever and ever.
Amen.
(Bose Community)

1. Lectio (to read the Word / to listen to it)

Mark 10:46-52

a. 46-48

They reached Jericho; and as he left Jericho with His disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus – that is, the son of Timaeus – a blind beggar, was sitting at the side of the road. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout and cry out, ‘Son of David, Jesus, have pity on me.’ And many of them scolded him and told him to keep quiet, but he only shouted all the louder, ‘Son of David, have pity on me.’

b. 49

Jesus stopped and said, ‘Call him here.’ So they called the blind man over. ‘Courage,’ they said, ‘get up; He is calling you.’

c. 50-52a

So throwing off his cloak, he jumped up and went to Jesus. Then Jesus spoke, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ The blind man said to Him, ‘Rabbuni, let me see again.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Go; your faith has saved you.’

d. 52b

And at once his sight returned and he followed Him along the road.

a. >> The initial condition of Bartimaeus.

b. >> Jesus hears, stops, and calls him.

c. >> Bartimaeus gets up and goes to Jesus; he speaks to Jesus.

d. >> Bartimaeus follows Jesus.

One of St Mark’s Gospel’s features is its concise, immediate and precise style. In the last seventy years this text, which previously tended to be down played, has become increasingly relevant. And its progressive Christology has come to be regarded as the element that gives form to it. Thus, according to a literary-theological analysis, we can say that it is made up of a prologue (1:1-13) and two parts (1:14-8:26; and 8:27-16:8). The climax of the first part is St Peter’s profession of faith at Caesarea; the climax of the second part is the centurion’s profession of faith under the Cross. Each part is subdivided into three sections. The text of our Lectio belongs to the first section of the second part. The event occurs after the ‘third prophecy of the Passion’ and ‘the sons of Zebedee’s request’.

From a geographical point of view, the event occurs along the road where the rich young man had run up to Jesus but had been unable to give up his riches in order to follow Him.

Especially in this section of St Mark’s Gospel, the road becomes a ‘theological locum’ (the ‘road’ occurs 16 times altogether, but 7 times in this section): in fact, starting with 8:27 and up to 10:52, all the events take place on the road. From 11:1 onwards the events will take place in Jerusalem and in the Temple.

Therefore, Jesus' journey is a theological journey: it is the Messiah's path, leading to Jerusalem, where He will be crucified. It is a path full of misunderstandings and blindness: the road is a paradigm of our relation to Jesus' very person and to His own path. Discipleship can be measured by the willingness to tread the Master's very path, and to share His destiny.

In this section, the road hints also to the 'halakic' literary genre (from 'halak', 'to walk'; it means, 'path to be trodden', that is, the enumeration of a series of norms). Together with the 'haggadic' genre (from 'higgid', 'to relate'), they make unfold the pattern 'three prophecies of the Passion + reaction + Jesus' instructions'.

But let us go into the details of this passage...

a. 46-48

They reached Jericho; and as he left Jericho with His disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus – that is, the son of Timaeus – a blind beggar, was sitting at the side of the road. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout and cry out, 'Son of David, Jesus, have pity on me.' And many of them scolded him and told him to keep quiet, but he only shouted all the louder, 'Son of David, have pity on me.'

"They reached Jericho; and as He left Jericho...". Jesus and His disciples are in the land that was conquered by Joshua before entering the Promised Land: "There must be no poor among you. For the Lord will grant you His blessing in the country which the Lord your God is giving you to possess as your heritage, only if you pay careful attention to the voice of the Lord your God." (Dt 15:4-5) A land "where you will eat bread without stint". (Dt 8:9)

How come, then, Bartimaeus is a beggar? He is the 'son' ('bar') of 'honour' ('timeo'). And he is there seated, in his blindness, along the road ('parà ténhodòs'), a blind beggar: blind and expecting. Beggars have an attitude of both expectation and request at the same time.

His ear is attentive and he listens: Jesus of Nazareth is there, therefore he cries out. He calls Him "Son of David"; he begs for His pity. How much does Bartimaeus grasp of Jesus? Who is he asking to have pity of him?

He probably regards Him as the Messiah, according to popular sayings, a kind of king trying to establish his kingdom. His grasp of Jesus is limited... However, David is of paramount importance in Judaism, together with the promise of an eternal dynasty and sovereignty (cf 2 S 7:12-16). 'Son of David' was used by rabbis as one of the Messiah's titles, a title which occurs many times in the gospels.

This title was also popular with the crowd. In fact, at the beginning of the next section (chapter 11), when Jesus is about to enter Jerusalem, the crowd will hail Him shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the coming kingdom of David our father!" (Mk 11:10)

But why should Bartimaeus expect something of Jesus? Should he expect a kind of justice he is not experiencing at the moment, as his life seems to be a paradox to him? So the crowd tries to silence him.

The term 'epitimò' means to reproach, to send away, and it is used also when Jesus is dealing with devils who reveal His identity. (cf Mk 1:25; 3:12)

When he is near the Messiah who should bring justice to all, Bartimaeus shouts once again, but they want to silence him: the voice of a poor man crying is an act of accusation, a reproach against them: “Is there anyone poor among you, one of your brothers, in any town of yours in the country which the Lord your God is giving you? Do not harden your heart or close your hand against that poor brother of yours, but be open handed with him and lend him enough for his needs. Do not allow this mean thought in your heart, ‘The seventh year, the year of remission, is near,’ and scowl at your poor brother and give him nothing; he could appeal against you to the Lord, and you would incur guilt!” (Dt 15:7-9)

Bartimaeus is annoying. But Jesus’ presence has made him start moving out of his condition: from being stiff, to wait, to request. It is indeed by crying, by begging, by making a request, that Bartimaeus manages to get in touch with Jesus. Jesus responds because he is poor and needy.

b. 49

“Jesus stopped and said, ‘Call him here.’ So they called the blind man over. ‘Courage,’ they said, ‘get up; He is calling you.’ ”

Jesus stops along His journey to Jerusalem, along His path of faithfulness to the will of the Father. But does He really stop? In fact, this short time, this little event, contains the meaning and the fulfilment of His journey, that is, the Cross. Jesus the Man is listening and stops, thus showing the face of the Father who listens to the cry of the poor and needy, who cares for them, who has sent His own Son. To listen to someone means to care for that person. On the Cross, Jesus is listening very powerfully to the whole of mankind; indeed, He makes His own the cry of a blind mankind who does not know the face of the Father... On the Cross, Jesus will be mending the relationship between God and man, a relationship that has been torn, and also the torn relationship between man and man, and also the torn relationship between Him and all those who were reproaching Bartimaeus: to amend their mistake of silencing him, now they will call him (the verb ‘èphoné’ means ‘to give someone a call’) to make him stand (the verb ‘egeirè’ is the same used for the resurrection). This is the beginning of the little resurrection of Bartimaeus, slowly approaching salvation, that is, recovering the ability to see the light on the true face of Jesus: light on His mission, in order to learn how to give oneself to others and have a share in His path.

c. 50-52a

So throwing off his cloak, he jumped up and went to Jesus. Then Jesus spoke, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ The blind man said to Him, ‘Rabbuni, let me see again.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Go; your faith has saved you.’

Bartimaeus jumps up and throws off his cloak. He is full of joy. From a symbolical point of view, the cloak is a poor man’s one and only richness, his shelter. (cf Dt 24:13) It may also refer to life itself; to throw it off means that one is ready to give his life away. In the passage of the rich young man, on the contrary, the rich young man had run up to Jesus but had gone away sad, as he had not been able to give up his great wealth. In the passage which follows ‘The blind man of Jericho’ (Mk 11:8), the crowd will spread their cloaks on the road as an act of submission to Jesus entering the Holy City. Later on, when Jesus will stand in front of Pontius Pilate, the crowd will want Him crucified...

To go back to Bartimaeus' story, Jesus stops and asks him, "What do you want me to do for you?" This is the same question He posed to James and John earlier on.

Jesus stops in order to listen. In His humanity we can see the face of a God who has time for listening to us, who cares for man's requests.

Very often we are urged to do God's will, but God cares for what we wish, given that our deepest yearning for good comes from Him. He waits for us to let these good wishes emerge, to become aware of them by establishing a relationship of trust with Him. In the Scripture, in the Psalms, the greatest desire of all is to see the face of God!

Something is changing within Bartimaeus... by listening to him, by paying attention to him, by being at his service (in Mk 10:45 Jesus said, 'The Son of Man Himself came not to be served but to serve...'), Jesus is showing him God's face, He is letting a new relationship be established: He is no longer the Son of David according to the crowd's interpretation but the "Rabbuni", "My Master", a term which shows familiarity and respect at the same time. This term occurs only twice in the gospels, here and in Jn 20, and this implies that it is a very peculiar term, reserved for very special occasions. Jesus is no longer just the healer that St Mark presents to us, but the One showing the way, He in whom one has to put his faith, the Master who will respond by linking faith, sight and salvation: "Your faith has saved you".

Now Bartimaeus knows Jesus no longer by popular saying, but by the new relationship with Him that lets the greatest desire emerge within him: to see. And now he can see! Is this just physical sight?

Bartimaeus is not the first blind man we encounter in St Mark's Gospel. In Chapter 8:17-18, that is, at the end of the first part, after His disciples did not understand the metaphor of the yeast of the Pharisees, Jesus said to them: "Are your minds closed? [Are your hearts hardened?] Have you eyes and do not see, ears and do not hear?" After that comes the 'Cure of a blind man at Bethsaida', brought to Jesus.

Now, after James and John's misunderstanding, it is not by chance that comes the blind man Bartimaeus. Once again, the blind man is the symbol of the disciples who do not want to see. But Bartimaeus' blind trust is a rebuke to all those whose relation to Jesus was biased: the rich young man who was incapable of giving up wealth; the disciples, who are the true blind people in 8:18; James and John who, when Jesus poses the same question He asked Bartimaeus, are wrongly focussed on the kingdom...

d. 52b

And at once his sight returned and he followed Him along the road.

Bartimaeus starts moving and follows Jesus: he becomes the symbol of the true disciple. He is no more 'parà tén hodon', 'along the road', but 'en te hodo', on the way. This little difference is very important. 'En' shows that he is walking on the same way as Jesus, he is sharing in all faith his Master's life, he has decided to start walking on His same path and to share His destiny. This is 'sight', 'salvation', a transformation originating from being immersed in, and sharing the way / Life of the Master. The begging blindness turns into 'sequela', 'following',

while being conformed to the face of the Son, who serves man by revealing to him the face of a God who, up to the end, makes of Himself a gift to mankind. And Bartimaeus throws away his cloak, and gives his life away as a gift!

Later on, St Mark's progressive Christology will reveal that the crucified Christ is the face of a God capable of plunging Himself into the darkness of a forsaken man (cf Mk 15:33). And capable of staying there, begging, dwelling in the darkness of man, to show that even the darkness is not meaningless. It will be turned into fruitfulness, into a new, resurrected life. Christ is a Messiah who remains faithful to the face of the Father, who up to the end cannot but be a 'gift', cannot but love. This is not the Messiah of the crowds but the crucified Messiah, shattering to pieces all the fake images of God, blindness / idolatry.

In this cure of a blind man is hidden a Christological revelation: in the listening of Christ-the Messiah who cares for Bartimaeus' blindness, is foreshadowed the listening of the Man-God on the Cross, listening to the cry of the whole of mankind, making it His own and turning it into light. Then, under the Cross, the centurion will rightly say, "This man was indeed the Son of God".

2. Meditatio

(to meditate on the Word / to let it resound)

After listening, after establishing a relationship, the eyes which are short-sighted may open wide and see clearly.

If we listen, our neighbours may feel the wish to see the longing for light which is hidden in everyone.

This is 'service', but it has nothing to do with 'doing something for the others', but rather with 'being for the others'.

This service should make others wonder, and make their stiffness turn into an expecting attitude: each and every man is a beggar, he is waiting and expecting and demanding something for his life.

First of all, he demands that he may be noticed by somebody else, be called... He demands that someone may realize that he exists.

I believe that by listening to Jesus we are urged to become women who give others an opportunity to fulfil themselves, according to nn° 7 and 17 of the Rule. To become women who are attentive to the cry of those who "are on the road", a cry that most of the time is not expressed vocally but comes to the fore in a confused way. The road is one for all: it is the Way, Christ's Life. And Christ has come to serve man, by showing him the face of the Father, by awakening life that had become 'asleep', by making His own the cry of each and every man.

We are placed in between Bartimaeus and Christ: like Bartimaeus, thanks to Christ, by adhering in all trust to Him, we can follow Him on the Way, on His path. And on His Way we are urged, by listening, 'to be for the others', so that their longing for true life, their longing for sight may be fulfilled, and we may be driven on the same path as Christ's: on the road, He is the "man for the others".

This is what Bonhoeffer wrote: *“Christians believe that they must always offer something to others... They forget that listening may be a greater service than talking. Many people are looking for an ear that shall be willing to listen, but they do not find it among Christians, given that they keep talking when they should just listen instead.*

The words of those who are unable to listen for a long time – and patiently – will not genuinely move others. In the end, others will be insensitive to their talks. Another mistake is to listen being convinced that we already know what others have to tell us. It is a way of listening that is impatient and not focussed, disparaging our brothers and sisters, just waiting for them to keep quiet so that WE may talk instead...” (from ‘Common Life’)

3. Oratio

(to pray the Word / to repeat it)

Lord, teach me that life is a path,
neither the sterile conformism to pre-established rules
nor pointless transgression.
Teach me to be attentive to little things,
- to the footsteps of those who are walking with me,
so that my own footstep may not be longer than theirs,
- to the words I will hear, so that I may not be insensitive,
- to the eyes of my neighbours to guess their sadness
and come near them discreetly,
and to look after joy together.

4. Contemplatio

(to contemplate the Word / silence)

In silence, let us increase our longing for God, so that we may dwell in the core of mankind’s desire... In this communion, let us stay, stop, listen to other people’s cry as well as our own by the ear of the heart, in all simplicity.

5. Collatio

(to share the Word)

After exchanging our own experiences, we may try to let ‘resound’ what one of the Sisters said and what impressed us, so that we may welcome them and genuinely be near them.