

# **BIBLICAL PAGES**

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## **Jesus' places and relations**

### **Lectio n° 3 To see... life outside of the village**

#### **Introduction**

Only those who do not subscribe to common places, only those who are not blinded by dynamics of death or of survival ("We have always done like this..."), are able to open up other people's eyes and to let them 'go out'. But who among us is certain that he sees correctly? An external intervention is needed, and we are not capable of that. The village, the place where Jesus' encounter with the blind man takes place, is exactly the symbol of closeness to the outside world, the symbol of all those who are not able to get out of the world view that has been taught them, who are unable to see reality beyond the filter, fixed and thick, by which they subscribe to mass-induced views and judgements.

This symbol is typical of St Mark's Gospel: he makes use of the same terms that we can find in Jr 31:32, and he describes it as the place we need to go out of in order to be freed from oppression, from 'Egypt'.

In particular, if we examine Mk 8:33, the oppression is the false idea of the Messiah, as well as blindness towards Jesus' identity, blindness of those who are thinking "as men do", not "as God thinks".

In the village, then, the relation between Jesus and a man is established. That is the environment, the context of the words and gestures of Jesus, and where healing is demanded from Him. Jesus is the only one who can give us the things "as God thinks" as well as a new way of thinking.

#### **Let us invoke Jesus before listening to His Word**

May the Lord Jesus touch my eyes  
and make me able to see  
not what is visible but what is hidden.  
May He open these eyes  
so that they are able to contemplate not the present  
but the ultimate realities,  
to receive 'the eyes of the heart'  
through which, by His Holy Spirit,  
I can acknowledge Him in each and every of His Words.  
Amen.

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

#### **Mark 8:22-26**

22 They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought to Him a blind man whom they begged Him to touch. 23 He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. Then, putting spittle on his eyes and laying His hands on him, He asked, 'Can you see anything?' 24 The man, who was beginning to see, replied, 'I can see people; they look like trees as they walk around.' 25 Then He laid His hands on the man's eyes

*again and he saw clearly; he was cured, and he could see everything plainly and distinctly. 26 And Jesus sent him home, saying, ‘Do not even go into the village’.*

This passage is placed at the end of the first part of St Mark's Gospel, immediately before St Peter's profession of faith (Mk 8:27). The lines preceding it refer to the incapacity of the disciples to understand the miracle of the loaves... “They had forgotten to take any bread and they had only one loaf with them in the boat” (Mk 8:14). Jesus then gives them this warning: “Do you still not understand, still not realise? Are your minds closed? Have you eyes and do not see, ears and do not hear? Or do you not remember?” (Mk 8:17-18) This is the context in which they come to Bethsaida (which means, ‘House of fishing’), a town on the borders of Galilee, on the north shore of the Lake of Galilee, the hometown of Simon, Andrew and Philip, a town inhabited also by Gentiles and proselytes. In St Matthew's Gospel, this town will be harshly criticized by Jesus for being unrepentant, in spite of all the miracles performed by Him in it. (cf Mt 11:20-21)

In conclusion, taking into consideration the disciples' behaviour as well as the reference to Bethsaida, we can say that here there is a context of blindness, closeness, of which the blind man is also a symbol. In fact, his encounter with Jesus will give him much more than just physical healing.

Let us divide the text into its parts:

- Jesus takes the hand
- Jesus makes some gestures
- Jesus questions him
- Jesus sends him home

#### Jesus takes the hand

*“They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought to Him a blind man whom they begged Him to touch. 23 He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village.”*

Some people brought a blind man to Jesus so that He could touch him. The verb tense is the ‘aorist’, implying a brief action, lasting briefly in time. It were enough for Jesus to touch him once, and he would see again.

It must be highlighted that it is not the blind man asking Jesus to be touched, but other people make the request. They do not ask Jesus to give him back sight, just to touch him. To be touched means to experience the presence and closeness of someone: it is necessary for the blind man to experience Jesus' presence and nearness, in order for him to learn how ‘to see’.

Jesus does not flee, does not say anything: He is willing to be involved in the blind man's experience... and “takes the blind man by the hand”.

In Jeremiah 31:32, it is said that in spite of Israel breaking the Covenant, the Lord “took them by the hand to bring them out of Egypt”.

And Jesus, after taking the hand of the blind man, leads him outside... Outside Bethsaida? No, “outside the village”.

With that, St Mark implies that Jesus is leading him out of an oppressive environment, symbolized by the village, the place to be freed from. But what should one be freed from? As stated in Mk 8:33, the problem is to think “not as God thinks, but as men do”, that is, to think about the Messiah as society and Power do. (In Mk 7:8, Jesus said: “You put aside the commandment of God to observe human traditions.”)

Here, the name of the town of Bethsaida is replaced by a symbol, the “village”.

The verb used in Greek to describe Jesus' action suggests that, when taking the blind man's hand, He also lifted it. The blind man's hand is feeble... It seems to be lifeless, and needs to be lifted. In order to lead the man ‘outside’, Jesus' touch has to take into His hands the lack of vitality of the man, who has been brought to Him passively. Oppression, blindness, has made him void of vitality.

This blindness is similar to the disciples', who were unable to see the miracle of the loaves happening under their very eyes: being unable to see bread, the symbol of life, becoming superabundant under one's very eyes (Mk 7:44; 8:8) is similar to being unable to see the Light of Life. The breaking of bread happened under the disciples' very eyes, but they did not see and couldn't remember: their blindness prevented them from seeing Jesus' compassion when breaking the loaves and giving superabundant life to all, to both the five thousand of Israel and to the four thousand Gentiles (Mk 8:21).

### Jesus makes some gestures

*"Then, putting spittle on his eyes and laying His hands on him..."*

Let us ponder over the meaning of 'spittle' at the time. It was regarded as solidified breath; therefore, breath, the spirit, was transmitted by contact with the other.

Jesus puts spittle on the man's eyes. Here, however, the evangelist does not use the term 'oftalmos', 'eyes', but 'ommata', which has a wider meaning: 'sight'. St Mark is saying that Jesus is transmitting His Spirit to the inner sight of the blind man, then He lays His hands on him, which means that He is giving the man His life-giving power. This is a very different way of touching. Not only does He take and lift the hand in order to lead the man 'outside', but He also lays His hand, and by His touch He transfers onto the man something of Himself.

Through his experience, the blind man is sharing Jesus' life. This is a life-giving encounter, receiving His Spirit and life-giving Power.

### Jesus questions him

*"He asked, 'Can you see anything?' 24 The man, who was beginning to see, replied, 'I can see people; they look like trees as they walk around.' 25 Then He laid His hands on the man's eyes again and he saw clearly; he was cured, and he could see everything plainly and distinctly."*

What changes in the blind man? Jesus asks him if he can see anything (St Mark makes use of the verb 'blepo'). We must focus on two things.

1) Why is Jesus asking? He should know the power of His actions, shouldn't He? The woman with an haemorrhage just touched His mantle, and she was healed by a power that went out of Him.

In this passage St Mark is probably telling us that man has a role to play in miracles: at the very beginning the blind man is passive, then he starts experiencing Jesus (he has to clasp the hand that Jesus is offering him), and now Jesus questions him, as He wants him to become fully aware of what he has received. His previous actions (the spittle and the laying of hands) enable the blind man to do that, enable him to overcome passivity. How much has he been able to grasp of the spirit and life-giving power of Jesus? Did he welcome them? Did he modify his views accordingly?

Jesus' questions are a form of accompaniment, passing through the personal perception of the blind man, with neither imposing an ethos nor disregarding his personal advancement. By questioning him, Jesus places Himself in the very place where the other stands, helping him free himself from the oppression of the village's world views. Now Jesus is not only taking the hand, but also structuring the blind man's ability to see, while respecting the pace of the other.

2) St Mark makes use of two different verbs when the blind man talks about seeing. One is 'blepo' (used also by Jesus); the other one is 'orao', which means 'to see / to learn'. The issue at stake here is therefore the ability to decipher, to know and understand what is in front of him. Jesus is questioning him so that his gaze may be changed and he can understand reality correctly.

Now the blind man answers... Looking up ('anablepsas', this is a quote of Is 35:5) he says that he can see ('blepo') men who, to him, look ('orao') like trees as they walk around. And Jesus lays His hands on the man's eyes once again. What is St Mark telling us? The trees are living beings, and in Eastern culture they signal that nearby there is water and shadow. In the ancient cultures (the Jews, the Egyptians and so on) all

the cosmos was supported by a tree through which the sap of the divine life flew onto the earth and was conveyed to everything, to human beings too.

The man can see something, but he still grasps reality precisely according to that view... The life-giving tree, men originating from trees, walking trees, something alive but also inanimate, exactly as he used to be. Jesus does not intervene to correct or teach. He lays His hands once again on the man's eyes, He is close to the man, He gives life. Life will reveal itself depending on how much the man will be able to welcome it.

St Mark goes on saying that then the man saw clearly. In fact, the text has 'dieblepsen', that is, 'he opened his eyes'; 'apekateste', 'he was restored'; 'eneblepen', 'looked inside'. Inside what? Inside everything from a distance. 'Telaiugos' can be translated also with 'the ultimate brilliance of everything'.

To see the ultimate brilliance which resides within everything means to see beyond the appearance of everything. To see that brilliance means that blindness has gone away. It means also to understand the secret of what lies under the gaze. Previously, he looked but he could not see, now he looks and sees inside.

If we go back to Mk 4:21, we realize that the lamp is not brought in to be put under the bed, but on the lamp-stand, "for there is nothing hidden, but it must be disclosed, nothing kept secret except to be brought to light. The lamp shining in the dark is Jesus, revealing Himself and later on shining on the Cross, which will become His lamp-stand, given that it will show Him to the world.

Jesus silently establishes a contact with the blind man, because what is hidden cannot be communicated just with words. The silent contact leaves the blind man's experience free to grow, up to the following manifestation. It is an experience of a vital involvement opening him up and helping him get rid of old images (trees) in favour of a new principle of life, ie the principle of a life spent establishing relations with others and sharing their lives. Only after He has made him share His spirit and His life-giving power, Jesus allows him to see, to look at what is hidden beyond appearance: beyond a life defined by the image of the tree there is the life given by the human relation with Jesus.

Perhaps he started to see, beyond the deforming filters and what other people used to say about that Man standing in front of him, not the powerful Messiah, willing to fight, but the light of the loving God in the man Jesus. Perhaps he started to recognize Life itself hidden under the sign of the broken bread. Perhaps he started to see the brilliance of the Law, "Your Word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path" (Ps 119:105). A light obscured by human precepts (Is 29:13; Mk 7:13). Now he can grasp the meaning of everything... outside of the village, out of reach from the conditioning rule. You are thinking as God thinks, not as human beings do. (cf. Mk 8:33)

### Jesus sends him home

"*And Jesus sent him home, saying, 'Do not even go into the village'.*"

Jesus' invitation to go home without passing through the village is unusual. Let us try to understand...

It is as if Jesus wanted to protect the fragility of the new condition of the man. In fact, on one hand, Jesus does not just ask him to go back home, but He sends him back home, as if he were the proclaimer of a new way of seeing: to see according to God and not according to men. On the other hand, however, by sending him home He is sending him to a secure place, to his family, but also back to his roots, to the home he belongs to. This belonging has been divested of false images. To go into the village is strictly forbidden: now that he has come out of blindness (which is also a false way of seeing), Jesus takes care that he does not fall back into darkness, into human traditions... Jesus protects the work of His hands: His spittle, the laying on of hands, are symbolic gestures pointing to a re-creation of the old man, a blind man, into a creature that can see, sharing His spirit and His life-giving power, and seeing in Jesus both life and the One who gives it. Thus he is different from the disciples who cannot remember and are anxious of getting bread by themselves: they couldn't see life already present in Jesus, they couldn't remember its superabundance when He broke the bread (Mk 8:21), they did not acknowledge that Bread who was always with them, Jesus (8:14).

## **2. Meditatio** **(to meditate on the Word / to let it resound)**

The simplicity of this encounter of Jesus' fascinates us. Why is Jesus so simple?

He shows a silent peacefulness. In all the passage there is only one question and an invitation, together with great care, exact gestures, attention to the other, protection of the future.

Starting from the end of the passage we are dealing with, I add a brief 'foreword' so that we can get nearer to Jesus' way of behaving: do we really believe, like Him, that the ultimate brilliance of everything, that is, His life, inhabits in everything? And that our goal is that life can manifest itself, always and everywhere, beyond the appearances of death?

Which are the appearances of death, or walls, encircling you?

- Re-live with Jesus the simplicity of lifting a hand... taking someone by the hand in order to establish a relation of nearness, with no words, and in order to 'lead him outside': **human relation**.
- Without trying to correct the other's way of thinking, how do you react? Who, apart from the Spirit of the Lord, can give true sight? **I invoke the Holy Spirit**.
- Do you perceive that the relation involves, establishes communion between a part of you and the other, builds a bridge, but at the same time leaves the other free, does not impose your views, leaving time to the other to form his own personal understanding of reality, the gift of being able to see beyond: **God will manifest Himself**.
- The encounter will happen thanks to your affirmation, by your life, of your identity of faith, a clear identity originating from the discernment of the gift of light which lives within you, to get in touch with that fragment of Jesus' life that He has given to the other: **witness by attraction**.
- Protect the gift of light in the other and find ways preventing him to fall back into darkness: **take care of the Christ, of the hidden Life in each and everyone**.

This is the very invitation of n° 11 of our Rule of Life: **trust in Life**.

"You shall be mindful that, when you silently bear Christ, you will be able to help Him see the light in your brothers' and sisters' hearts. You will be for them a haven where God never stops reconciling them to Himself, in order for them to have a share in His glory."

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*A witness*

Hi to everyone, my name is Elena Z., I was born in the town of Zaparozhye but I spent my childhood in the orphanage of Kherson. Unfortunately I was born in a society where the image of healthy and strong men ruled, therefore when handicapped children were born, the doctors used to convince parents to reject them. I wasn't spared that fate, and I ended up in an orphanage because my parents rejected me. My life in the orphanage was hard: they were taking us on holiday, they organized parties for us, they gave us presents, but they showed us no kind of love, and they always remained distant.

When they were correcting us, they had no love either, and that was unfruitful, given that both the children and the personnel remained on their relative positions.

I stayed at the orphanage until I was 17... My life was empty and boring and meaningless, because I was crossed. There were questions in my mind: "Why was I born thus?" "Why did my parents reject me?"

While I was attending the last year of school at the orphanage, some people started coming to visit us, and they were Christian. I met them and we became friends. They started inviting me to their home and I began going to their home regularly. The relations between us became closer and closer, we started trusting in one another, until they welcomed me into their family, and there I encountered Christ.

Before I learnt something about God, I sometimes went to church but I was full of doubts. I was wondering: "Is He really existing?" I had many questions to put to God, I used to pray a lot but didn't get any answer. Suddenly I got angry and started living without Him. In the orphanage many believers used to come to visit us. They used to say: "Children, God loves you". But that was meaningless for us, given that there was no example we could see of that love.

On the contrary, in that family they showed me an example of the love of Christ, after which hope and faith flourished in me. Through them the Lord showed me that there is somebody for whom I am necessary and interesting; and my life has completely changed.

After the orphanage I went to college and I became a social worker. After that, I would have liked to go to university and get a degree in that field, but I was scared of having to live on my own. I did not have a house, a job or money, but luckily God sent me Tanja who introduced me to the Emmaus Association. There I met many good friends, who helped me pass the admission exam and invited me to live in the 'Flying House'. Consequently, I am currently attending the Humanistic-pedagogy Academy, specializing myself as a Social Worker and learning to live in an autonomous way. After getting a degree I would like to start my own NGO, to help young people like me. I am very grateful to all the people who are helping us and who take part in this project and who are involved in my life. By your support you make our lives better. Thank you.

### **3. Oratio** **(to pray the Word / to repeat it)**

Can a blind man guide another blind man?

Lord, how can I welcome my sister into my life?

I have no qualities,

I am waiting for You to take me by the hand,

and by that contact a chain of hand, a chain of life, will originate.

Is reality beyond appearance enclosed into the deepness of that gesture?

If seeing has to do with living with You,

with coming outside, emerging from darkness, as in a new birth,

please make me be born once again, Lord!

And that chain of hand

only thus can be a chain of births,

a chain of lives who can see.

### **4. Contemplatio** **(to contemplate the Word / silence)**

Let us look at Jesus' simplicity, letting Him shed light on us, letting Him destroy our inner walls, which make up 'villages' within us... In the love that we have received as a gift, let us re-consider our relations with the very eyes of the Holy Spirit.

## **5. Collatio**

**(to share the Word)**

Let us share the Word's resonance in us; let us give to our Sisters the light we have received as a gift, with a raised hand.