

OCTOBER 27 2024 FATHER MICHAEL COUTTS

As we come to the end of this liturgical year, we hear a lot about the end times, death and judgment, and the mood is basically one of doom and gloom. So, it is wonderful to hear Jeremiah's song of celebration.

Actually, it was meant for the people of Israel who were taken into captivity in Babylon about six centuries before Jesus, and they were so full of despair. Judah had been destroyed, and their temple in Jerusalem had been in ruins. And they said—you know that beautiful song "By the Rivers of Babylon," which we boost up, it was a sad song indeed. And they said, "May my tongue cling to the top of my mouth and may my arm wither if I should ever forget you, Jerusalem."

And so, it was great joy that Jeremiah would say, "The time of captivity has come near. The blind will see, the deaf will hear, the lame will leap for joy." A perfect backdrop to our Gospel today, when a blind man begins to talk. Now, don't think I've made a mistake. You'd say a blind man sees, but this blind man began to talk, and I'll come to that a bit later.

Here we have the letter to the Hebrews also giving a sense of consolation and joy and celebration, and it's all around the priesthood. The priesthood that was in the Old Testament was the priesthood of Leviticus, where a man was chosen by the people, for the people, to offer prayer and sacrifice to God for their sins. But being a sinner, a man himself, he was a sinner himself, and therefore, he had to offer sacrifice both for himself and for the people. But now, we have an eternal high priest, not one according to the order of the Levites, but according to the order of Melchizedek—an eternal high priest, where he did not need to

offer sacrifice for himself because he was actually chosen by God. And he offered a salvation that was for the sins in the past, the sins in the present, and sins in the future.

And you may say, "What about the sins in the future? How can you offer a sacrifice for them?" Because for God, there is only one, a now. There's no yesterday, today, and tomorrow. It's just the present moment. And so, when Jesus offers a sacrifice of salvation, it is for all time. I remember flying over Ireland, and we were so high up that I could see the whole line in one sight. And I could see a car right at the beginning, I could see where it would reach in about two hours, and I could see where it ended. This was the image that I got, which could help me to understand how God could forgive, past, present, and even in the future.

Which brings me to Bartimaeus. Now, whenever Jesus healed anybody, their names were never mentioned—the woman with the haemorrhage, the man dropped through the roof, the demon cured in Gergesa. But this time, it is named. You see, in the early church, the Gospel was an oral tradition, and they needed memory helps. Bartimaeus was pretty well known in Jericho. He would be at one corner, begging all the time. And so, when they told the story of a blind man, they said, "Ah, I can remember. It is Bartimaeus, and he used to be at this corner at this time."

And now, we come to the story of Bartimaeus himself. And Jesus asks him, "What do you want me to do?" Which seems rather odd for Jesus to ask Bartimaeus. But you see, many times, when you and I pray, we don't ask for what we need; we ask for what we desire and what we want. Bartimaeus could have very well said, "You know, it's a hot day here in

Jericho. A good glass of cool beer would have been just nice." That would have been good, but not exactly fulfilling what Bartimaeus needed. So, when you and I go to prayer and ask God, what is the thing that we want and what are the things that we truly need?

And Jesus opens Bartimaeus' eyes so that he can speak, speak in words that are prophetic to you and to me. He does three things. He throws off his cloak, the thing that was very precious to him. If you want to meet the Savior, you have to give up, empty your hands, so that you can be filled with the grace of God. The second thing, he asks. And when people tell him to keep quiet, and Jesus has not come for the likes of you, he shouts even louder. And therefore, when our prayers don't seem to be answered at a time, we need to pray even louder.

God bless you all.