

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY
Luke 18:31-43

There are two main lessons in our Holy Gospel today. First, we will be sorely disappointed if we presume to come to our Lord for earthly exaltation instead of heavenly exaltation, that is, to be exalted in this life instead of the next. Second, we do well to dare to come to our Lord as a beggar for mercy, because He longs to show mercy to those bold enough to approach Him for it.

Our Holy Gospel begins with Jesus explaining something to the apostles that many of us might take for granted, knowing that Lent is just around the corner. Taking the twelve aside, Jesus said to them: ***“See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise.”***

What does Luke tell us though? He writes, ***“But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said.”*** And don't you have to wonder why? That was the whole reason Jesus had come, wasn't it, to suffer, die, and rise to redeem mankind? It was the heart and core of the first promise in Genesis and every promise of a Messiah after that in the Old Testament. Jesus had told them before that this would happen. It was no secret. So why didn't the apostles understand it. In fact, Luke mentions at least three times in his Gospel that when Jesus spoke this way His apostles didn't get what He meant, even though it sounds so straightforward.

The problem wasn't that Jesus' words were unclear. The problem was that the apostles hopes weren't right. The apostles were hoping that Jesus would exalt them in this life, and if you know the history of the apostles, you know how silly that must have seemed to them later, as all but one of them was martyred, put to death for preaching our Lord. But that is what they thought at the time. They thought that Jesus was a great man who would accomplish great things and surely become more powerful than even King David had been. He would be an earthly leader of incomparable greatness. Who would possibly oppose Him, after all? He held power over the winds and the waves, and even over death itself. And Jesus was greater than David, but as He would tell Pilate before He was crucified, His kingdom was not of this world. His throne would not be in Jerusalem, now a Roman outpost, like David's, but rather His throne was in heaven, the new Jerusalem, and was eternal.

We can't be too hard on the apostles, though. It's fallen human nature to seek earthly exaltation instead of heavenly, to seek secondary things first. Many of us have done so before. For instance, some men are tempted to go into the ministry, not to preach Christ and Him crucified, but to be the one up front, held in high esteem by the people, and given the floor to speak. Some in the ministry, afraid of rocking the boat or upsetting people with the truth of the Word, are tempted to worry more about the earthly praise people give them than obedience to Christ's commands and their people's eternal well-being. Some in the pews in the church, sporadically at best, only have use for Christ when they want to be exalted. Rarely giving, they are more than ready to take. They are there for the sprinkles but little more: to have water to be sprinkled on *their child* in Baptism, flowers down the aisle at their wedding, and dirt on their casket at their committal, after being duly eulogized, of course. On such occasions, even lifelong Christians can act as if Christ is nothing more than a party coordinator, there to keep attention focused on them instead of as their Savior and the be all

and end all of their lives. In these ways and many others, such an attitude betrays a false hope, just like that of the apostles at this point in Jesus' ministry, focused upon earthly exaltation and not heavenly, rooted in earthly pride and not the humility of faith.

Do you know who did get it? The beggar in our Gospel. While everyone else looked at him and saw a worthless waste of flesh, or Lord saw in Him His most sincere, sober, and insightful disciple at the moment. He came to Jesus as a Christian should. He too came in a daring manner, but not a presumptuous manner like the apostles or like us when we want Jesus to give us everything we want but are unconcerned with Him giving us what we need. The beggar knew what he needed. Yes, he wanted healing, but that was not specifically what He asked for. In fact, he made no mention of it as He called out to Jesus. What did he ask for? Maybe you just assumed he asked for healing because that's what you would have asked for and didn't listen close enough to realize your mistake. Listen again: ***"As he drew near to Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. And hearing a crowd going by, he inquired what this meant. They told him, 'Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.' And he cried out, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!'"*** He may have been a dirty beggar, but he was not so shameless as to simply show up before Christ and make demands or dictate what Christ would and wouldn't do for him. He wasn't in church because he wanted something. He was in church, so to speak, because he knew he needed something. And so he asked for mercy, which is not getting what one deserves, which in a sinner's case is death and hell.

Jesus was moved by the sight of this man. Our Lord saw his heart, and there He saw faith. Even though the disciples would have prevented the man from even coming near our Lord because he was unworthy in their view, Jesus commanded them to bring him to them because the beggar was in fact more worthy, precisely because He knew He was unworthy. ***"He asked him, 'What do you want me to do for you?' He said, 'Lord, let me recover my sight.' And Jesus said to him, 'Recover your sight; your faith has made you well.'"*** Once the beggar had been shown mercy, had been invited into God's presence and allowed to stand there through faith without judgment or wrath, now it was time for icing on the cake. Jesus asked him what he would like Him to do for Him, and only then did the beggar ask for his sight. And Jesus gave it to him. Why? Did Jesus simply want everything to be perfect for him on this day? No, Jesus healed him because this man was His son, *His* child. ***"Your faith has made you well,"*** Jesus said.

Jesus came to suffer, die, and rise to save us, not for sin but from sin, and not for this life but forever. He came to exalt us, not here and now, but then and eternally. He came to suffer, die, and rise so that we could find mercy, and that mercy, first and foremost, is what the church exists to proclaim, witness, apply, and show. Everything else someone might want from the church or come to it in the hopes of receiving is icing on the cake and window dressing, and we do well never to give the impression that that isn't the case, because then we do a horrible disservice to the unchurched, so that the church becomes little more than a social club and party planner in their eyes instead of God's ark and gateway to the life Christ bled to give us.

Don't be bashful before your Jesus, my fellow Christians. But don't be bashful for the right things, that is, for spiritual things. Be bold, not as a spoiled brat, but as a persistent beggar. And I guarantee that you will not be disappointed, because in such a way you find precisely what you need most, and what our Lord died and is dying to give you: mercy. Hold onto that mercy and let everything else you seek from Him flow from and be founded upon His holy passion, where He has shown and won you mercy. Amen.

