

RABBONI, I WANT TO REGAIN MY SIGHT – Biblical Commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM

Mk 10. 46-52

[At that time], as Jesus was leaving Jericho with His disciples and a large crowd, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the road. When he heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many were sternly telling him to be quiet, but he kept crying out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

And Jesus stopped and said, "Call him here." So they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take courage, stand up! He is calling for you." Throwing aside his cloak, he jumped up and came to Jesus.

And answering him, Jesus said, "What do you want Me to do for you?" And the blind man said to Him, "Rabboni, I want to regain my sight!" And Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and began following Him on the road.

This passage is strictly linked to the previous one, when James and John ask Jesus to grant them the seats on his left and right, in the moment of Jesus' glory. So the passage has to be read in this perspective.

Let's see it then. "*They came to Jericho*". Jericho is the last village on the way to the promised land that Joshua entered with his own, and "as Jesus was leaving", the evangelist uses a verb which was previously used for the exodus, meaning that the last step of Jesus' mission is exodus, and a strange character is being introduced: "*Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus*". In the original Greek text his Greek name, the son of Timaeus, comes first and secondly his Aramaic equivalent, Bartimaeus.

Usually, as Mark introduced an Aramaic expression, he used to put it in this language first, and then the Greek translation followed. For example, when he says "*Talitha koum*", which means

"Little girl, I say to you, arise!", or when he says "Ephphatha", that is "Be opened!"; here the Greek term comes first instead "the son of Timaeus", where Timaeus means "the honored, the esteemed", and then the Aramaic equivalent.

This is because the evangelist meant to give a warning "Pay attention! Beyond the historical reality, this is a symbolic character through whom I represent the disciples – James and John – who, though Jesus said he was going to die, had ears and didn't hear, had eyes and didn't see, as they were looking for triumph".

This is the son of Timaeus. It is strange that he is being introduced as "the son of honor", but his name is not given at all.

"*He was a blind beggar*". The reason for his blindness, as Jesus had already said warning his disciples, "*they have eyes and don't see, ears and don't hear*". Furthermore the evangelist provides another explanation, while specifying that he "*was sitting by the road*".

"*By the road*". In chapter 4 of this same Gospel, vers. 15, Jesus said that that the word is sown on the path and Satan comes to take it way. Satan is the image of power. Disciples are blinded by a nationalist ideology for power, so that they are not able to receive the word of the Lord.

"*When he heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene*" – Nazareth was a small town in Galilee where Zealots were barricaded, so 'Jesus the Nazarene' means 'the revolutionary, the belligerent' – "*He began to cry out and say «Son of David!»*"

He was blind. Jesus is the Son of God, not the Son of David. "Son", in that ancient culture, referred to the one behaving like his father; "Son of David" was an expression recalling the awaited Messiah, the powerful, violent and strong one, as David used to be, a kind who succeeded in gathering the twelve tribes of Israel and give them a capital, Jerusalem, but all through violence.

Jesus is not the Son of David, he is the Son of God. Jesus doesn't take life away, he gives his own life. This is the reason for the blindness; the blind addresses to Jesus calling him "Son of David".

"*Son of David, have mercy on me!*" In this expression he is begging to regain his sight. "Have mercy on me"; it is the people that sees the Son of David, the solution to its painful situation, that is domination. It is just when entering Jerusalem, Jesus is addressed with "Hosanna to the Son of David!".

Well then, even if many rebuke him, "*he kept crying out all the more «Son of David, have mercy on me!»*", asking Jesus to restore the monarchy in Israel, in fact. "*And Jesus stopped and said, «Call him here»*".

He calls him just like he called his disciples who were following him but were not really with him. They are far away because they're victims of this religious ideology. They call him and here begins the conversion of the disciple. "*Throwing aside his cloak*" – cloak used to represent the

individual, so here it means breaking off with his past and his ideology – finally it is him who comes to Jesus and not Jesus coming to him and following him.

“And answering him Jesus said” – and Jesus addresses to him with the same words he used for James and John, following their request - *“«What do you want me to do for you?»”* Through this literary tool, the evangelist wants us to comprehend that this episode of the blind man, provides the explanation of the request made by James and John.

“And the blind man said to him, «Rabboni»” – no more calling him ‘Son of David’. “Rabboni” was a reverential expression used to address to God; teachers in Israel were called “Rabbi”, but God was named “Rabboni”; the disciples seem to have understood.

“I want to regain my sight!” This means that once he used to see and he became blind because of his religious and nationalist ideology, the one of a triumphant Messiah that caused his blindness.

“And Jesus said to him, «Go; your faith has made you well»”, when the disciple understands this, he enters his freedom, *“immediately he regained his sight”*, he was seeing just like before being blinded by his ideology, *“and began following him on the road”*.

The translation here is “on the road”, but the right one should be “in the road”. As we already said “on the road” as a negative meaning, representing the seed that has been taken away by birds – that is Satan – while “in the road”, means the road marked by Jesus; finally the disciple is following the Lord.