

Quinquagesima , A ✠ D 2011

Luke 18:31-43

In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

1 Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem. This is the end of the preparation for our journey. Wednesday we will embark on our trip: forty days of travelling throughout Lent, headed toward the most holy season of the year, culminating with the sacred Triduum, the Church's most cherished service—the three days of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday, with the highest service, the apex of the year, the Easter Vigil. That's where we're headed. And the journey is long. Most people spend the hours before a journey frantically packing last-minute items and stressing over what details they might be forgetting. Not the Church. Quinquagesima, the fiftieth day before Easter exists to remind you that you have everything you need.

2 Grace alone, the Word of God alone, now faith in Christ alone: everything you need. "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." Jesus predicted His passion, His crucifixion at the hands of the Gentiles, and His resurrection, but the disciples understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said. But blind Bartimaeus saw. The blind man sees what the disciples do not. Lord have mercy.

3 To the One headed to Jerusalem to be mocked, shamefully treated, spit upon, flogged, and killed, Bartimaeus prayed, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" In Jesus, the promised Son of David, the Messiah on His way to be crucified, the Lamb who goes uncomplaining forth to bear the sins of the world, Bartimaeus has everything he needs: mercy. Even before Jesus restored his sight, blind Bartimaeus saw by faith. Jesus is everything he needs. The blind man sees what the disciples soon will. Lord have mercy.

4 Lent is not a sad time. It is somber, yes, but not sad. It is quiet, yes, but not hopeless. Lent is a time of purposeful, penitential self-denial precisely because in Jesus, you have everything you need. We are headed to Jerusalem and to the cross, Jesus declared. Not "I" am headed to the cross, but "we" are headed to the cross. The cross is not a tragedy. It is a triumph. Jesus did not shy away from the cross, but for the joy that was set before Him, willingly endured the cross. So we will sing in Lent, "A Lamb goes uncomplaining forth, The guilt of sinners bearing And, laden with the sins of earth, None else the burden sharing; Goes patient on, grows weak and faint, To slaughter led without complaint, That spotless life to offer, He bears the stripes, the wounds, the lies, The mockery, and yet replies, 'All this I gladly suffer.'" Christ goes willingly to the cross, to bear the sins of the world and gladly to die for them. The blind man sees what the disciples witnessed. Lord have mercy.

5 You need not fear the cross, nor shy away from it. With faith in Jesus, the crucified and risen Savior, you have everything you need. We are headed to the cross. Lent is a journey, and we are at the precipice, the point of embarkation. We are here confidently, knowing that the cross and the resurrection await us. With confident faith in the Lamb of God who has taken

away the world's sin, who in Baptism has joined us into His certain death and resurrection, we are free to endure whatever crosses and trials await us in this Christian life. Free from having to answer for our own sins, free from having to earn God's favor, we are set free to take up our own crosses, to endure suffering, to deny ourselves. The Christian life is self-denial. The blind man saw; the disciples saw; so we too see by faith: Jesus is all we need. Everything else is rubbish in comparison. Lord have mercy.

6 The point of Lent is not to feel sorry for Jesus or even to feel sorry for yourself. The point is to grow in love: love for your Lord and love for your neighbor and to receive God's gifts of repentance and forgiveness in order to remove whatever hindrances there may be to this growth. You are free in Lent to deny yourself because in Jesus you have everything you need. You are free to fast, free to endure hunger, to realize that in Jesus, your most pressing hunger is met. You are free to spend more time in prayer, at the expense of whatever else wants to command your schedule, because you know that in Jesus, you have everything you need. You are free to give extra in Lent, increase your Christian acts of mercy and almsgiving, because you don't need it. You have everything you need in Jesus and are free to use the earthly treasures He has given you to help your neighbor, to live in love toward those you encounter each day.

7 Lent is a journey of freedom. You are free to join healed Bartimaeus in following Jesus and giving praise to God, because you have been freed from spiritual blindness of unbelief. You are free to join with the disciples in heading to Jerusalem, to the cross, because by the cross Jesus has completely paid for your sins, completely redeemed you from the devil, the world, and your sinful flesh. You are free to join with the whole Church of Christ to receive the Body and Blood of Him who was crucified and who lives, knowing that in Jesus, you have everything you need. Every need is met. Nothing is lacking. Eat and drink freely. Nothing is required of you. Enjoy the journey. Lord, have mercy.

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Pastor Jeff Hemmer