

It is significant that today's gospel comes right after last Sunday's gospel about James and John seeking to sit at the right and left hand of Jesus, not realizing, not seeing what this would involve.

The disciples, as you may recall, had an entirely different agenda, as they ask for seats of honor. Jesus speaks of suffering; they speak of glory, a misguided glory, a glory that does not include suffering.

Wanna be a great athlete? Sacrifice. Great student? Sacrifice. How much more so for a Christian.

What comes next in this section of Scripture is the story of blind Bartimaeus. This may look a bit random, but Mark's placement of this miracle is intentional. He specifically ties it into last week's gospel.

For example, there is the underscoring of Bartimaeus' name. Verse 46 says, "Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus." Now, the name Bartimaeus, literally means "son of Timaeus." So, why the repetition? It is redundant to say Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, unless, of course, you are trying to make a point.

That is precisely what Mark is doing. The Greek meaning of Timaeus is "honor." Bartimaeus, "son of honor." Last weekend, we heard James and John asking for positions of honor. They wanted to be sons of honor without the cost or faith itself.

Bartimaeus shows us what it takes to be son or daughter of honor, sitting beside the road with nothing but his faith, calling out. People told him to shut up, he was making too much noise. But he shouted all the more. (How many of us might have remained quiet about our faith in Jesus?)

"Call him," Jesus said.... "Take courage" they told him. "Get up, Jesus is calling you." Then, the account continues, "He threw aside his cloak, sprang up, and came to Jesus."

He came, of course, still in the dark. Notice, he threw aside his cloak. It was a strange thing for a blind person to do: would he find it again? Blind people have great trouble finding things, they need the world to stay put.

But sighted people are forever throwing things around. In throwing his cloak aside Bartimaeus acted like a sighted man, a man who sees through eyes of faith. While all the sighted people held their cloaks and their possessions around them with careful fingers, he alone leaped up, threw aside his cloak and ran to meet Christ.

Seeing is believing, we say. The meaning of today's gospel reading is best expressed by turning that phrase around. Believing is seeing. There is a kind of seeing that is even more basic than the sight of our eyes.

That is the kind of sight that Jesus restores. Trust God and then you will see. That is precisely

what Bartimaeus did.

And finally, notice the question Jesus asks Bartimaeus in verse 51: "What do you want me to do for you?" This is precisely the same question Jesus asked James and John in last week's gospel. They are exactly the same words.

The problem with the disciples is that they were actually the ones who were truly blind. They could not see what was involved. They wanted something, but they did not see what was connected with it, meaning the cross.

So why do you think Mark has put this account of "the son of honor" being enabled to see in this particular place? Well, Jesus is saying something to his disciples and to us. He is saying, "Bartimaeus, the son of honor, was blind and he knew it". The disciples, who wanted to be sons of honor, were blind as well, but they didn't know it.

They thought they could see but could not. Bartimaeus knew he could not see. The symbolism is that when we truly recognize our inadequacies, our limitations, our needs, that will always get Jesus' attention.

More importantly, we need to ask God to open our eyes, that we may see the implications of our desires. When the Lord asked me, I said "I want to be a priest." It was only afterward, that I would begin to understand the enormity of my answer. How much more so in this day and age of the Church.

"What do you want me to do for you?" Our response, our prayer, should be, "Lord, I want to see you. I want to see through your eyes. I want to understand what's really important to you. Lord, help me to see."

If this is truly what you want, if you really mean total surrender, then be prepared because your life will never be the same. But in the end, you will see.

(Briefer homily as the seminarian spoke after communion about his calling to the priesthood.)