

30th Sun. Ord. Time (B)
St. Athanasius and St. Francis Parishes
October 24, 25, 2015

As you know, the gospel account of St. Mark is quite small; it is the shortest of the four Gospel accounts that we have. Yet in such a short gospel account we are given two stories of blind men being cured. The first one is recorded at the end of Chapter 8, and then we have today's story from Chapter 10. Ever since mid-September we have been hearing gospel texts from material that lies between these two healings of blindness. We have heard Jesus warn more than once about the bad example of the Pharisees and other religious leaders, and we have heard Jesus give three very clear predictions of his suffering and death. Also in these 3 short chapters we have heard Jesus ask his disciples who they really thought he was; Jesus was testing them to see if they were actually on board with him. He did everything he could to keep them connected to Himself, his teaching, and especially to his coming journey through death into new life. It seems that Jesus was interested in three things with regard to his disciples: accompaniment, affection, and accountability. (I find it pretty interesting that last year when Pope Francis first met with some bishops and families in preparation for the Synod on Families just concluding this weekend, he used the same 3 attributes ... accompaniment, affection, and accountability.)

Accompaniment Jesus was intent on being the companion of his disciples. As their shepherd He could not let them wander; he wanted to be in touch with them
Affection Jesus would often show love to his disciples... the love He felt from God His Father, and the love of the Father that he was passing on to his disciples.
Accountability ... but Jesus also made every effort to hold the feet of the disciples to the grindstone. Jesus worked to make his disciples accountable ... to Him, and to each other.

Sight is an important and significant matter when it is addressed in the gospels. And as you would assume, it is not just about physical sight. When Jesus deals with blindness, he always directs his words and actions about blindness to mean blindness to good, blindness to God's love and mercy. Jesus wants people to be able to see the goodness, the love and the mercy of God, his Father.

At a conference I attended some years ago on the Consistent Ethic of Life, one of the speakers was a woman physician from George Washington University Medical Center in Washington, D.C. She said that when people are faced with life and death issues, more often than not they ask for two things: love and connectedness. In life and death situations, what gives meaning and matters most are not the things we may have asked for earlier ... like a particular food, a special chair, or a trip to something on our 'bucket list'. As I think about this again, even now after several years, I am amazed at how intent Jesus was on providing these very things for his disciples. It was his mission to love his

disciples and to connect them to His Father and to teach them. Moreover, He tried to teach them how much they really needed these and even desired these. Through his teaching he opened their eyes to love and to being connected. That is a teaching and message that today's Scriptures can have for us also. It leads me to thinking about how a parish is a wonderful community of woven lives.

After I am in a parish for a while, and I am getting to that point here, it is absolutely amazing and humbling to stand in front of you and know so much of your ups and downs, your successes and your struggles. I often wish you could trade places with me on a given Sunday. But you can look at the front cover of the new parish pictorial. How many of those people do you know, and how much do you really know about them? Parishes have histories, histories of families, histories of individuals. As I mentioned, parishes are communities of woven lives. And, most importantly, parishioners should be welcomed into the community and known by the community.

One of the saddest times I experienced in a parish was when a particular parishioner was diagnosed with ALS. She was someone who was always present at Mass and parish events. Then she simply disappeared from us. She did belong to a long-standing prayer group with other women in the parish, but while she continued to meet with them, she would never allow them to speak of her illness and her dying. She had connected actually with another person who kept telling her that healing came from the inside, and that she could will herself well. While all of this was known to her friends and to the parish in general, there was little way to connect. When the death happened, my first call was from those in the prayer group who were so hurt, and even angry that they had been kept from praying with their dear friend, and walking with her through her disease and her dying.

I myself felt terrible about this, but there was no way into the situation. It went against everything I believe about parish life. It went against everything I believe about Christian community and discipleship. When we are baptized into Jesus, we are baptized also into the lives of each other. But we need to make efforts to be with and be for each other. Every birth is a parish birth ... every death is a parish death every wedding is a parish wedding every situation of cancer, dementia, mental illness and mental retardation is a similar moment in the lives of us all as a parish our lives are woven together.

When Jesus healed the blind man in today's gospel story, he was really making an effort to open the eyes of everyone else to the needs of this man, and also the needs of all others. Actually he was opening their eyes to the incredible work and power of His Father in heaven. And that is the lesson for us today. As a family woven together in Jesus, how will we open the eyes of each other to the incredible work and power of God? What can we do this week to

- accompany each other on our journey of faith
- show love and affection and concern for each other
- and yes, hold each other accountable.

Help me learn how to do this for you. I will try to help you learn how to do this for others and also for me.