

***BLIND BARTIMAEUS OF JERICHO***  
***Lord Have Mercy***  
***RIGHTEOUS LIVING***

**December 3, 2023**  
**14th Sunday of Luke**  
**Revision D**

**Gospel: Luke 18:35-43, Matthew 20:29-34, Mark 10:46-52**  
**Epistle: Ephesians 5:8-19**

In the West, today’s Gospel lesson is also used in the weeks preceding Easter on the Sunday before Ash Wednesday.

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**Blind Bartimaeus of Jericho**

The healing of a blind man is covered at two other occasions in the Orthodox lectionary: The man born blind (John 9) on the 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Pascha and the two blind men of Galilee (Matthew 9:27-35) on the 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost. In each case, including today’s Gospel, a recurring theme is that some people who are physically blind have spiritual insight and that some who have good physical eyesight are completely blind to spiritual things. As John Chrysostom said<sup>1</sup>, “Let us listen to these blind men, who were better than many that see”.

Whereas today’s Gospel took place in the Spring of 30 AD just before Holy Week, the man born blind was healed the previous Autumn and the two blind men of Galilee were healed a year before that. All of these have Messianic implications for those who have eyes to see it. Referring to the coming of the Messiah, Isaiah wrote: “Then the eyes of the blind will be opened and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped” (Isaiah 35:5; see also Isaiah 29:18, 42:7).

The context of today’s Gospel lesson is the final journey to Jerusalem, 30 AD. Jesus announced to the Twelve that they were going to Jerusalem and that He would be delivered to the Gentiles, mocked, insulted, spit on, scourged and killed. And He would rise on the third day. But this was hidden from them and they understood nothing (Luke 18:31-34).

As they passed by Jericho, they met a blind man who was begging. In the parallel accounts in Matthew and Mark, some additional details are given. In Mark 10:46-52, the blind man was named Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus. In Matthew 20:29-34, Bartimaeus had a friend with him who was also blind. Together they continuously cried out, “Lord have mercy!” and neither the crowd nor the disciples could shut them up until Jesus responded to their request. Following his healing, Bartimaeus glorified God and so did all the people.

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<sup>1</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXVI, 1.

## **Bartimaeus Teaches Us About Mercy**

Bartimaeus and his friend together continuously cried out, “Lord have mercy!” and neither the crowd nor the disciples could shut them up until Jesus responded to their request. Their persistence teaches us a lot about our relationship with God.

Cyril of Alexandria comments<sup>2</sup> on the Faith of Bartimaeus by examining his use of the term Son of David. He stated that the blind men had some amazing insight into the identity of Christ.

“In what character then do they address to Him their prayer? Is it as to a mere man, according to the babbling of the Jews, who tried to stone Him with stones, saying in their utter folly, ‘for a good work we stone You not, but for blasphemy; because that You being a man make Yourself God’? (John 10:33). But must not the blind men have understood that the sight of the blind cannot be restored by human means, but requires, on the contrary, a divine power, and an authority such as God only possesses? For with God nothing whatever is impossible. The blind men drew near to Him, therefore, as to the Omnipotent God; but how then did they call Him the Son of David? What therefore can one answer to this? The following is perhaps, as I think the explanation. As they had been brought up in Judaism, and were by birth of that race, the predictions contained in the Law and the Holy Prophets concerning Christ of course had not escaped their knowledge. They had heard in the Temple the chanting of that passage in the book of the Psalms: ‘the Lord has sworn the truth to David, and will not reject it, that of the fruit of Your loins will I set upon Your throne’ (Psalm 131:11). They knew also that the Prophet Isaiah had said, ‘And there shall spring forth a shoot from the root of Jesse, and from his root shall a flower grow up (Isaiah 9:1). And again, this as well: ‘Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bring forth a son, and they shall call His Name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us’ (Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:23). As ones, therefore, who already believed that the Word, being God, had of His Own Will submitted to be born in the flesh of the holy virgin, they drew near to Him as to God, and said, ‘Have mercy upon me, Son of David (Luke 18:38). For Christ bears witness that this was their state of mind in offering their supplication, by saying unto them, ‘Your faith has saved you’” (Luke 18:42).

Cyril also pointed out that Bartimaeus:

- Referred to Jesus as Lord as well as Son of David (Luke 18:41)
- Asked Him to perform an act only God could do (Luke 18:41)
- Confessed his faith in spite of many rebukes (Luke 18:39)
- Glorified God following his healing (Luke 18:43).

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<sup>2</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on Gospel of Luke, Chapter 18, Homily 123, Studion Publishers, 1983, p. 499.

John Chrysostom pointed out<sup>3</sup> that Christ did not ask the blind men, “Do you believe?” as He had done with many others (e.g. Mark 5:36, 9:23, 11:22-24, John 11:40). Because their cry and their coming to Him was sufficient to make that obvious.

John Cassian described<sup>4</sup> the bounty of God and how it is actually shaped according to the capacity of man’s faith. His aim is to draw mankind to salvation, but this can take different paths for different people. We hear the same words repeated, “Let it be done for you according to your faith”. There are many different circumstances where these words appear in the Scriptures, as described below. The bottom line is that God grants His healing not according to the uniform power of His Majesty, but according to the measure of the faith in which He finds each one, or as He Himself has imparted it to each one

“God’s ‘judgments are unsearchable and His ways past finding out!’ (Romans 11:33), by which He draws mankind to salvation. And this too we can prove by the instances of calls in the Gospels. For He chose Andrew and Peter and the rest of the apostles by the free compassion of His grace when they were thinking nothing of their healing and salvation (Mark 1:16-18). Zacchaeus, when in his faithfulness, he was struggling to see the Lord, and making up for his littleness of stature by the height of the sycamore tree, He not only received, but was actually honored by the blessing of His dwelling with him (Luke 19:2-9). Paul even against his will and resisting He drew to Him (Acts 9:1-6). Another He charged to cleave to Him so closely that when he asked for the shortest possible delay in order to bury his father, He did not grant it (Matthew 8:21-22). To Cornelius when constantly attending to prayers and alms, the way of salvation was shown by way of recompense. By the visitation of an angel he was bidden to summon Peter, and learn from him the words of salvation, whereby he might be saved with all his family (Acts 10:1-8). And so, the manifold wisdom of God grants with manifold and inscrutable kindness salvation to men; and imparts to each one according to his capacity the grace of His bounty. So that He wills to grant His healing not according to the uniform power of His Majesty, but according to the measure of the faith in which He finds each one, or as He Himself has imparted it to each one. For when one believed that for the cure of his leprosy the will of Christ alone was sufficient, He healed him by the simple consent of His will, saying: ‘I am willing; be cleansed’ (Matthew 8:3). When another prayed that He would come and raise his dead daughter by laying His hands on her, He entered his house as he had hoped, and granted what was asked of Him (Mark 5:22-43). When another believed that what was essential for his salvation depended on His command, and answered: ‘Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed’ (Matthew 8:8). He restored to their former strength the limbs that were relaxed, by the power of a word, saying: ‘Go your way; and as you have believed, *so* let it be done for you’ (Matthew 8:13). To others hoping for restoration from the touch of His hem, He granted rich gifts of healing (Matthew 9:20-22). To some, when asked, He bestowed remedies for their diseases. To others He afforded the means of healing unasked: others He urged on to hope, saying: ‘Do you want to be made well?’ (John 5:6) To others when they

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<sup>3</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXVI, 1.

<sup>4</sup> John Cassian, 3<sup>rd</sup> Conference of Abbot Chaeremon, II, xiii, 15.

were without hope He brought help spontaneously. The desires of some He searched out before satisfying their wants, saying: ‘What do you want Me to do for you?’ (Matthew 20:32). To another who knew not the way to obtain what he desired, He showed it in His kindness, saying: ‘Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?’ (John 11:40). Among some so richly did He pour forth the mighty works of His cures that of them the Evangelist **says**, ‘And when Jesus went out, He saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick’ (Matthew 14:14). But among others the unfathomable depth of Christ’s beneficence was so stopped up, that it was said: ‘Now He could do no mighty work there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed *them*. And He marveled because of their unbelief’ (Mark 6:5-6). And so, the bounty of God is actually shaped according to the capacity of man’s faith, so that to one it is said, ‘According to your faith let it be to you’ (Matthew 9:29). And to another: ‘Go your way; and as you have believed, *so* let it be done for you’ (Matthew 8:13); to another ‘O woman, great *is* your faith! Let it be to you as you desire’ (Matthew 15:28), and again to another: ‘Receive your sight; your faith has made you well’” (Luke 18:42).

John Chrysostom pointed out<sup>5</sup> how these blind men had nothing else going for them in their poverty and hopelessness. All they had was their fervor and desire for Jesus to heal them.

“Let us learn that though we are very vile and outcast, but yet approach God with earnestness, even by ourselves we shall be able to affect whatever we ask. Notice these men, how, having none of the apostles to plead with them, but rather many to stop their mouths, they were able to pass over the hindrances, and to come to Jesus Himself. Matthew bears witness to no confidence of life in them, but earnestness sufficed them instead of all.”

“These then let us also emulate. Though God defers the gift, though there be many withdrawing us, let us not desist from asking. For in this way most of all shall we win God to us. See at least even here, how not poverty, not blindness, not their being unheard, not their being rebuked by the multitude, not anything else, impeded their exceeding earnestness. Such is the nature of a fervent and toiling soul.”

Cyril of Alexandria concluded<sup>6</sup>: “Understand from this, my beloved, that faith sets us also in Christ’s presence, and so brings us to God, as for us to be even counted worthy of His words. For when the blind men were brought to Him, He asked them, “What do you want Me to do for you?”” (Luke 18:41). This is an important question in that it directs us to what is our real desire. Do we just want something physical or does our desire go beyond that to true spiritual insight? Do I really want to be free of being enslaved to the passions or do I really like the passions and just want something temporary?

John Cassian pointed out<sup>7</sup> how we are given the grace of opportunities for salvation and prosperous undertakings by God. But it is up to us to follow up the blessings which God gives us

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<sup>5</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXVI, 1.

<sup>6</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on Gospel of Luke, Chapter 18, Homily 123, Studion Publishers, 1983, p. 500.

<sup>7</sup> John Cassian, Conference of Abbot Paphnutius, I, iii, 19.

with earnestness or indifference. Jesus passed by the blind men; this is grace. That they cried for mercy was an act of their own faith. The ten lepers were all healed after asking for mercy; that was grace. When one of them returned to give thanks, that was the response of a grateful heart that the Lord looks for.

“Scripture declares that it was the free gift of God that Israel was brought into the land of promise, that many nations were destroyed before them, that nations more numerous and mightier than them were given up into their hands. But whether Israel utterly destroys them, or whether it preserves them alive and spares them, and whether or not it makes a league with them, and makes marriages with them or not, it declares lies in their own power. By this testimony we can clearly see what we ought to ascribe to free will, and what to the design and daily assistance of the Lord. It belongs to divine grace to give us opportunities of salvation and prosperous undertakings and victory: but that it is ours to follow up the blessings which God gives us with earnestness or indifference. This same fact we see is plainly taught in the healing of the blind men. For the fact that Jesus passed by them, was a free gift of Divine providence and condescension. But the fact that they cried out and said ‘Have mercy on us, O Lord, Son of David!’ (Matthew 20:31), was an act of their own faith and belief. That they received the sight of their eyes was a gift of Divine pity. But that after the reception of any blessing, the grace of God, and the use of free will both remain, the case of the ten lepers (Luke 17:12-19), who were all healed alike, shows us. For when one of them through goodness of will returned thanks, the Lord looking for the nine, and praising the one, showed that He was ever anxious to help even those who were unmindful of His kindness. For even this is a gift of His visitation; that he receives and commends the grateful one, and looks for and censures those who are thankless.”

Cyril of Alexandria referred<sup>8</sup> to Bartimaeus as being freed from a double blindness: first from the blindness of his eyes, and second from a blindness of heart and mind. The vision of his heart was infectious also in that it caused “all the people when they saw it, to give praise to God” (Luke 18:43). Thus, even the people that had rebuked Bartimaeus now began to see spiritually themselves. This happens to us also: as we see and hear from God, we help those around us to do so also. However, there will always be those who refuse to see: like the Scribes and Pharisees who crucified Jesus a few weeks after this.

John Chrysostom stated<sup>9</sup> that Jesus seemed to always ask people what they wanted Him to do for them. This is to demonstrate their virtue and to show that they were worthy. After He healed them, they proved He was right by being grateful for the gift.

“Why does Jesus ask them what they wanted Him to do for them? Lest anyone should think that when they wish to receive one thing, He gives them another thing. This is usual with Him on every occasion, first to make clear and demonstrate to all the virtue of those He is healing, and then to apply the cure, that He might lead on the others likewise to emulation. Another reason He did it this way is to show that they were enjoying the gift worthily. This He did with respect

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<sup>8</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on Gospel of Luke, Chapter 18, Homily 123, Studion Publishers, 1983, p. 501.

<sup>9</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXVI, 1.

to the Canaanite woman also (Matthew 15:22-28), this too in the case of the centurion (Matthew 8:5-13), this again as to her that had the issue of blood (Mark 5:25-35), or rather that marvelous woman even anticipated the Lord's inquiry. He didn't pass her by, but even after the cure singles her out. Such earnest care He had on every occasion to proclaim the good deeds of those that came to Him, and to show them to be much greater than they are; and He does this here also."

"Then, when they said what they wished, He had compassion on them, and touched them. For this alone is the cause of their cure, for which also He came into the world. But nevertheless, although it is mercy and grace, it seeks out the worthy. That they were worthy is clear, both from what they cried out, and from the fact that, when they had received, they did not hasten away, as many do, being ungrateful after the benefits. No, they were not like this, but were both persevering before the gift, and after the gift were grateful, for 'they followed Him'".

In early 30 AD, a few months before He was crucified, Jesus healed this pair of blind men near Jericho. They cried out to Jesus as He passed by, "Son of David, have mercy on us!" (Matthew 20:29-34) Jerome applied<sup>10</sup> the wisdom of these blind men to our everyday life.

"Imitate those blind men for whose sake the Savior left His home and heritage and came to Jericho. They were sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death when the light shone upon them (Matthew 4:15-16). When they learned that it was the Lord who was passing by, they began to cry out saying: 'Son of David, have mercy on us' (Matthew 20:30). You too will have your sight restored, if you cry to Him, and cast away your filthy garments (Mark 10:50) at His call. 'When you turn and bewail yourself then you shall be saved, and then you shall be able to see where you have been'. Let Him but touch your scars and pass his hands over your eyeballs. Although you may have been born blind from the womb (John 9:1) and although your mother may have conceived you in sin (John 9:2-3), he will purge you with hyssop and you shall be clean, he will wash you and you shall be whiter than snow (Psalm 51:5, 7).

### **Other Blind Men Are Healed**

Jesus healed other blind men; for example, earlier during His 3-year public ministry, Jesus was followed by two blind men. This event is covered in more detail on the 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Pascha.

"When Jesus departed from there, two blind men followed Him, crying out and saying, 'Son of David, have mercy on us!' And when He had come into the house, the blind men came to Him. And Jesus said to them, 'Do you believe that I am able to do this?' They said to Him, 'Yes, Lord'. Then He touched their eyes, saying, 'According to your faith let it be to you'. And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly warned them, saying, 'See that no one knows it'. But when they had departed, they spread the news about Him in all that country" (Matthew 9:27-31).

These two men were not very well off physically, but were strong in the Faith. The two blind men, whose only lot in life was begging, kept crying out as they followed Jesus (i.e. following

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<sup>10</sup> Jerome, Letter to Sabinianus, CXLVII, 9.

the noise of the crowd), “Son of David, have mercy on us!” (Matthew 9:27). This expression indicates that they recognized Jesus as Messiah. John Chrysostom stated<sup>11</sup> that the prophets also used the term “Son of David” when addressing the king, whom they wished to honor and declare great (compare Isaiah 37:35). Jesus allowed the blind men to continue crying out to Him along the way as He traveled to the house He was to stay at that evening.

Chrysostom explained<sup>12</sup> that there was a lot going on at this time. Jesus was trying to draw out the faith exhibited by the blind men; also, He was trying to show us to repel the glory that comes from the multitude. He was also instructing the Jewish leaders, who did exactly the opposite of the blind men. We note that the blind men progressed from calling Jesus “Son of David” to calling Him “Lord”. Jesus did similar things for the paralytic, Jairus’ daughter, the centurion, and His disciples from the storm.

Why can it be that Jesus put the blind men off, while they were crying out? Here again, He teaches us utterly to repel the glory that comes from the multitude. For because the house was near, He led them there to heal them in private. This is evident from the fact that He charged them to tell no one.

But this is no light charge against the Jews. When these blind men, though their eyes were struck out, receive the faith by hearing alone, but the Jews beheld the miracles, and having their sight to witness what was happening, do just contrary. Notice the earnestness of the blind men, both by their cry, and by their prayer itself. For they did not merely approach Him, but with loud cries, and saying nothing else but ‘mercy’.

And they called Him ‘Son of David’, because the name was thought to be honorable. In many places, for instance, the prophets likewise so called the kings, whom they wished to honor, and to declare great. Having brought them into the house, Jesus put to them a further question. In many cases He made a point of healing after people asked, lest any should suppose Him to be rushing upon these miracles through vainglory. And not on this account alone, but to indicate also that they deserve healing, and that no one should say, ‘If it was of mere mercy that He saved, all men ought to be saved’. For even His love to man has a kind of proportion; depending on the faith of those that are healed. But not for these causes only does He require faith of them, but since they called Him ‘Son of David’, He wanted to lead them up to what is higher. To teach them to entertain the imaginations they ought of Himself, He said, ‘Do you believe that I am able to do this?’ He did not say, ‘Do you believe that I am able to entreat my Father, that I am able to pray’ but, ‘that I am able to do this?’

What then is their word? ‘Yes, Lord’. They didn’t call Him Son of David any more, but soar higher, and acknowledge His dominion. And then at last He for His part lays His hand on them, saying, ‘According to your faith let it be to you’. And this He does to confirm their faith, and to show that they are participators in the good work, and to witness that their words were not words of flattery. For neither did He say, ‘Let your eyes be opened’, but, ‘According to your faith let it be to you’; which He said to many of them that came unto Him. Before the healing

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<sup>11</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXXII, 1.

<sup>12</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXXII, 1.

of their bodies, He wanted to proclaim the faith in their soul; so, as both to make them more approved, and to render others more serious. Thus, with respect to the paralyzed also; for there too before giving nerve to the body, He raised up the fallen soul, saying, 'Son, your sins are forgiven you' (Mark 2:3-5). And the young damsel too, when He had raised her up, He detained, and by the food taught her who her Benefactor was (Mark 5:42). In the case of the centurion also He did in like manner, leaving the whole to his faith (Matthew 8:5-13). When delivering His disciples from the storm on the sea, He delivered them first from their lack of faith (Matthew 14:24-32). Just so likewise in this case; He knew, even before their cry, the secrets of their mind; but that He might lead on others also to the same earnestness, He makes them known to the rest as well, by the result of their cure proclaiming their hidden faith.

Irenaeus of Lyons stated<sup>13</sup> that man has free will and that this is under his own control. Man's faith is his own, just like his opinion is his own. With respect to faith, man is in his own power and we should cultivate that.

"Not merely in works, but also in faith, God has preserved the will of man free and under his own control, saying, 'According to your faith let it be to you' (Matthew 9:29); thus, showing that there is a faith specially belonging to man, since he has an opinion specially his own. And again, 'If you can believe, all things *are* possible to him who believes' (Mark 9:23); and, 'Go your way; and as you have believed, *so* let it be done for you' (Matthew 8:13). Now all such expressions demonstrate that man is in his own power with respect to faith. And for this reason, 'He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him' (John 3:36). In the same manner therefore the Lord, both showing His own goodness, and indicating that man is in his own free will and his own power, said to Jerusalem, 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under *her* wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate'" (Matthew 23:37-38).

Basil the Great stated<sup>14</sup> that worship follows faith and faith is confirmed by power. The believer knows from what he believes and believes from what he knows. We may not comprehend, but still we know.

When did Abraham worship God? Was it not when he believed? And when did he believe? Was it not when he was called? Where in this place is there any testimony in Scripture to Abraham's comprehending? When did the disciples worship Him? Was it not when they saw creation subject to Him? It was from the obedience of sea and winds to Him that they recognized His Godhead (Matthew 8:27). Therefore, the knowledge came from the operations, and the worship from the knowledge. 'Do you believe that I am able to do this? They said to Him, "Yes, Lord"' (Matthew 9:28); and he worshipped Him. So, worship follows faith, and faith is confirmed by power. But if you say that the believer also knows, he knows

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<sup>13</sup> Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies, IV, xxxvii, 5.

<sup>14</sup> Basil the Great, Letter to Amphilochius, CCXXXIV, 3.



from what he believes; and *vice versa* he believes from what he knows. We know God from His power. We, therefore, believe in Him who is known, and we worship Him who is believed in.

Clement of Alexandria stated<sup>15</sup> that nothing is lacking to faith; it is perfect and complete in itself. Having in anticipation grasped by faith that which is future, after the resurrection we receive it as present, as Christ said, “According to your faith let it be to you”. In illumination (Baptism) what we receive is knowledge, and the end of knowledge is rest.

“He says, ‘He who believes in the Son has everlasting life’ (John 3:36). If, then, those who have believed have life, what remains beyond the possession of eternal life? Nothing is lacking to faith, as it is perfect and complete in itself. If anything is lacking to it, it is not wholly perfect. But faith is not lame in any respect; nor after our departure from this world does it make us wait, who have believed, and received without distinction the earnest of future good. But having in anticipation grasped by faith that which is future, after the resurrection we receive it as present, in order that that may be fulfilled which was spoken, ‘According to your faith let it be to you’ (Matthew 9:29). And where faith is, there is the promise; and the consummation of the promise is rest. So that in illumination what we receive is knowledge, and the end of knowledge is rest — the last thing conceived as the object of aspiration. Just as inexperience comes to an end by experience, and perplexity by finding a clear outlet, so by illumination must darkness disappear. The darkness is ignorance, through which we fall into sins, completely blind as to the truth. Knowledge, then, is the illumination we receive, which makes ignorance disappear, and endows us with clear vision. Further, the abandonment of what is bad is the adopting of what is better. For what ignorance has bound, is by knowledge loosed; those bonds are with all speed slackened by human faith and divine grace, our transgressions being taken away by one Paeonian medicine<sup>16</sup>, the baptism of the Word. We are washed from all our sins, and are no longer entangled in evil. This is the one grace of illumination, that our characters are not the same as before our washing.”

### **Lord Have Mercy**

The Church has taken the persistence of Bartimaeus and his friend to heart and the term “Lord have mercy” appears frequently in the Orthodox Liturgy. But there is a depth to this usage that often goes unappreciated.

The Greek word *eleos* meaning compassion or mercy is used widely in the New Testament as a noun, verb (to have mercy), adjective (merciful) and as a noun directed toward someone (compassionateness). This latter use of the root word *eleos* is often translated “*alms!*” Following is a summary of the use of *eleos*:

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<sup>15</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*, I, 6.

<sup>16</sup> This term comes from ancient Mesopotamia where the goddess Gula presided over health and healing. The rod, intertwined with serpents, which today is the insignia of the medical profession, originated with her son, Ninazu. See <https://www.ancient.eu/article/687/health-care-in-ancient-mesopotamia/>.

### **People Continuously Crying Out “Lord Have Mercy”:**

- Blind Bartimaeus and companion
- Two blind men: (Matthew 9:27-31)
- Canaanite woman for her daughter; (Matthew 15:21-28, Mark 7:24-30)
- Ten lepers: (Luke 17:11-19)

### **People Begging, Imploring, Trembling, Prostrating:**

- Man for epileptic son: (Matthew 17:14-21, Mark 9:14-29, Luke 9:37-42)
- Jairus for daughter: (Luke 8:40-56, Matthew 9:18-26, Mark 5:21-43)
- Woman with hemorrhage: (Luke 8:43-48, Matthew 9:20-22, Mark 5:25-34)
- One leper: (Luke 5:12-16, Matthew 8:1-4, Mark 1:40-45)

In these last three cases, *eleos* isn't mentioned but is implied.

### **Many Times, the Lord Shows Mercy Without Specific Requests:**

- Virgin Mary at Incarnation (Luke 1:46-55)
- Elizabeth at the birth of John (Luke 1:57-58)
- Zachariah, regarding John's mission (Luke 1:67-79)
- The Apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 7:25, 1 Timothy 1:13-16)
- The Gadarene Demoniac (Mark 5:19)
- Epiphroditus (Philippians 2:27)
- The Gentiles (Romans 15:9, 1 Peter 2:10)
- All believers (Romans 11:30-32, 2 Corinthians 4:1, Ephesians 2:4, Titus 3:5, 1 Peter 1:3, Jude 21)
- God has mercy on whom He will (Romans 9:15-18)

### **The Lord Desires Mercy, Not Sacrifice:**

Under the Old Testament Law, animal sacrifice was required for forgiveness of sins. The animal sacrifice represented judgment on the animal in place of the offeror, and this foreshadowed Christ's sacrifice for us. However, without mercy in one's heart, sacrifice is pointless. For example:

- The Prophets Hosea and Micah had said it (Hosea 6:6, Micah 6:6-8)
- The Scribes and Pharisees didn't understand it (Matthew 9:13, 12:7, 23:23)
- Judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy (James 2:13)
- The wisdom from above is full of mercy (James 3:17)

### **Mercy is Often Called “Alms”:**

Exploring further the depth of the word *eleos*, it is often translated “alms” from its use in context. But “alms” are merely mercy shown from one person to another in terms of money. Following are some examples where *eleos* could be translated either “mercy” or “alms”:

- The Good Samaritan showed mercy (Luke 10:37)
- Dorcas of Lydda was full of good works and of mercy (Acts 9:36)

- Cornelius of Caesarea showed much mercy to the people (Acts 10:1-2). His mercy went up as a memorial before God, (Acts 10:4) and was remembered in the sight of God (Acts 10:31).
- Paul took a collection in Achaia and Macedonia (Romans 15:25-28) at the end of his third missionary journey. He called this mercies and offerings for his nation (Acts 24:17).
- By showing mercy, we gain treasure in heaven (Luke 12:31-33)
- Jesus spoke to the Pharisees: “You clean the outside of the cup or dish, but the inside is full of robbery and wickedness. Give mercy and the inside is clean also” (Luke 11:39-41). Showing mercy cleans out our insides also.
- When we show mercy, we are exhorted to do so cheerfully (Romans 12:8). There is a lot to be cheerful about.
- And also, secretly, that our Father who sees in secret will reward us openly (Matthew 6:1-4), where only God sees the good stuff.

All this is quite a depth to the simple request, “Lord have mercy” that we say so often for ourselves and others. Mercy was a major focus of the message of the Twelve Apostles. We see this in their greetings in their writings: “Grace, mercy and peace...” (2 John 3, 1 Timothy 1:2, 2 Timothy 1:2, Titus 1:4). “Mercy, peace and love...” (Jude 2). “Peace and mercy on the Israel of God” (Galatians 6:16). With this as a background, it’s hard to imagine that we could say “Lord have mercy” too often.

# ***RIGHTEOUS LIVING***

**December 3, 2023**  
**26th Sunday after Pentecost**  
**Revision E**

## **Epistle: Ephesians 5:8-19**

Today’s Epistle lesson is used often in the West, either for the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent or the 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity.

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## **Background to Ephesians**

Paul wrote his Epistle to the Ephesians from house-arrest in Rome in about 62 AD. He had first met with and reasoned with Jews in the synagogue there in about 52 AD on his Second Missionary Journey (Acts 18:19). Although Paul did not stay there long in 52 AD (Acts 18:20), he left Aquila (of the Seventy) and his wife Priscilla there and promised to return (Acts 18:18-21). About 53 AD, Paul returned on his Third Missionary Journey and spent two years in Ephesus (Acts 19:8-10). At this time, the church took a separate direction distinct from the synagogue. On his return to Jerusalem at the end of his Third Missionary Journey in 57 AD, Paul had a very emotional farewell meeting (Acts 20:37-38) with the elders of the Church (Acts 20:17), knowing he may never return.

Ephesus had had a number of distinguished visitors over the years. The Apostle John and the Virgin Mary had gone there to escape the bloodbath of Herod (Agrippa) trying to please the Jews – which resulted in the martyrdom of James the son of Zebedee and the imprisonment of Peter (Acts 12:1-4). That bloodbath began in 44 AD and ended with the death of Herod soon thereafter (Acts 12:20-23). Apollos (of the Seventy) also was in Ephesus in 53 AD and vigorously refuted the Jews showing from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah (Acts 18:24-28).

After the death of the Virgin Mary in the mid 50’s AD, the Apostle John returned to Ephesus and worked with a number of Churches in that area: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea (Revelation 2, 3). John may have been in the area when Paul wrote his Epistle.

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We might note that Paul, in his humility, had been preparing the saints of Asia Minor for the Apostle John between 46 AD and c. 55 AD. When the Apostles in Jerusalem divided up the world after Pentecost and drew lots to see who should go where, John had drawn the lot for Asia Minor. But John was also constrained from going there by the Lord until the death of the Virgin Mary (John 19:25-27).

### **The Saints as Light to the World (Ephesians 5:6-14)**

Paul had just finished encouraging the saints to be imitators of God, offering themselves as an offering for a sweet-smelling aroma (Ephesians 5:1-2). Paul had similarly encouraged the Roman Church to do so (Romans 12:1). On the other hand, the world around them was involved in other uses for their bodies: fornication, uncleanness, covetousness, etc. (Ephesians 5:3-4). Paul reminded them not to be partakers with them (Ephesians 5:7) since

- No one who does these things has any inheritance in the Kingdom of God (Ephesians 5:5).
- Don't let empty words deceive you about this (Ephesians 5:6).
- Because of these things, the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience (v.6).

The context implies that some of the believers in the Ephesus area were involved with the things mentioned (Ephesians 5:3-5). Paul thus encouraged the saints to walk as children of light since **they now are light in the Lord** (Ephesians 5:8). Christ, the Head of the Body, had come as Light overcoming darkness (John 1:4-9). If the saints are to imitate Him, they need to be light also. In being light, all they need do is exhibit the fruit of the Spirit: good works, righteousness and truth (Ephesians 5:9); this is well pleasing to the Lord (Ephesians 5:10). Part of this is remembering our baptism (Romans 6) and that we were bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:20, 7:23).

One aspect of the fruit of the Spirit, namely truth, involves the responsibility not to ignore the unfruitful works of darkness (Ephesians 5:11), but reprove them. Paul said not to have any fellowship with them, but don't just ignore them either. Speaking the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15) was a major factor in the maturity of the Church. Speaking the truth with one's neighbor (Ephesians 4:25, Zechariah 8:16) was supposed to be part of the Old Covenant and is of major importance now that we are members of one another (Ephesians 4:25) in the Body of Christ.

Besides exposing the unfruitful works of darkness, Paul said that, "it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret" (Ephesians 5:12). This admonition extends even to gossip about someone's sin; the gossip-minded person shares in the sin of the unfruitful works of darkness. Even this is shameful, and is not what Paul is encouraging the Ephesians to do.

John Chrysostom points out<sup>17</sup> here that Paul said to reprove, not to judge. So long as the wound is concealed in darkness, it is secure; once it is brought to the light, the darkness is cleared away.

“The Lord had said, ‘Judge not, that you be not judged’ (Matthew 7:1) and He spoke this with reference to very small errors. Indeed, He added, ‘why do you

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<sup>17</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XVIII, vv. 11-13.

look at the speck in your brother's eye but do not consider the plank in your own eye' (Matthew 7:3). But Paul did not say to judge; he said to reprove. What Paul is saying is that sin is sometimes like a wound; so long as it is imbedded and concealed outwardly, and runs beneath the surface, it receives no attention. So long as it is concealed, being as it were in darkness, it is daringly committed in full security. But as soon as 'it is made clear' (Ephesians 5:13), it becomes light – not indeed the sin itself but the sinner. For when he has been brought out into the light and admonished, and then he has repented, have you not cleared away all darkness? Have you not then healed his world?".

Chrysostom adds<sup>18</sup> that some people fear that they will be hated for convicting a brother of sin. Doing so can represent showing true love to our brother. Even if he is incorrigible, we need to do our duty before God; a man will listen differently to a friend than a chance acquaintance.

"If a man robs someone we justly convict him, but yet we may fear being hated by him. Convict your brother; incur enmity for the love's sake which you owe to Christ and for the love's sake which you owe to your brother. Stop him as he is on his road to the pit of destruction. When we see him lying prostrate in the furnace of wickedness, let us raise him up. 'But', they say, 'it is no use; he is incorrigible.' However, we need to do our duty and then we have excused ourselves to God. It is for this that we have speech, and a mouth and a tongue that we may correct our neighbor. It is the dumb and reasonless creatures only that have no care for their neighbor, and take no account of others."

"There is no evidence of friendship so true as to never overlook the sins of our brethren. And it is not on our neighbor, but on ourselves that we are conferring the chief benefit. It is for this that we are friends that we may be of use to one another. A man will listen in a different spirit from a friend than from a chance acquaintance."

In this same vein, Ephesians 5:14 has been called an early baptismal hymn that may have been adapted from parts of Isaiah (Isaiah 26:19, 60:1). The message of the hymn is to awake from the sleep of sin (Romans 13:11-14, 1 Thessalonians 5:5-8) and arise from being dead in our trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1) and put on the armor of light (Romans 13:12) and walk in the light (John 12:35, 11:9, 9:4).

### **Redeeming the Time (Ephesians 5:15-17)**

Having awakened out of the sleep of sin, Paul encouraged the saints to walk carefully, not as unwise but as wise and to redeem the time. The term "redeem" and "redemption" had connotations in 1<sup>st</sup> century Israel that have been largely lost today.

According to Mosaic Law, every firstborn from man or animals was to be redeemed (Exodus 13:11-12). The firstborn of clean animals were offered as a sacrifice (Numbers 8:17). The firstborn of unclean animals (e.g. a donkey) were redeemed with a lamb (Exodus 13:13, 34:20). And the firstborn of man was redeemed with a price: five shekels in silver (Numbers 18:16). Initially, the firstborn of every family was designated to serve the Lord as a priest (Exodus

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<sup>18</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XVIII, Moral.

13:2, 11, 12). But when only the Levites responded to Moses' call for repentance at the time of the golden calf (Exodus 32:26), the Levites replaced the firstborn in the Temple service (Numbers 3:12-13).

The principle behind redemption was a buying back; Christ did this for us by buying us back from the penalty of our sin (Hebrews 9:12-15). In the context of Ephesians 5, Paul spoke of the days being evil (Ephesians 5:16) and therefore needing to be redeemed or bought back. Paul used this same expression in his letter to the Colossians, which was written about the same time (Colossians 4:5).

Chrysostom stated<sup>19</sup> that the time needs to be redeemed from the evils that men do. We are just passing through on our way to the Kingdom of God. By bearing all things, we redeem the time.

“Christ had said, ‘Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof’ (Matthew 6:34). In what sense does He call the time evil? It is not the essence of the day, or the day as so created, but it is the things transacted in them. Now the events which take place in it are good things from God and evil things from bad men. So then of the evils which happen in the day, men are the creators and hence it is that the times are said to be evil.”

“Therefore, the time is not yours. At present, you are strangers, sojourners, foreigners and aliens (cf. Hebrews 11:37-38, Ephesians 2:19); seek not honors, seek not glory, seek not authority or revenge. Bear all things (1 Corinthians 13:4-7) and in this way ‘redeem the time’ or buy up for yourselves the opportunity”.

So how does one redeem the time? In the latter part of Ephesians, Paul details a number of specifics:

- Worship in the Church (Ephesians 5:18-21)
- Husbands and wives (Ephesians 5:22-33)
- Children and parents (Ephesians 6:1-4)
- Slaves and master (Ephesians 6:5-9)
- Spiritual warfare, weapons and readiness (Ephesians 6:10-20)

The bottom line to all these is walking carefully, not as unwise but as wise (Ephesians 5:15), and understanding what the will of the Lord is (Ephesians 5:17). This involves not growing weary of doing good (Galatians 6:9) and conducting ourselves throughout the time of our stay here in fear (1 Peter 1:17). We can then use earthly goods and actions to store up treasure in heaven (Luke 18:22, 12:21, 33).

### **Being Filled with the Spirit – Ephesians 5:18-21**

Chrysostom pointed out<sup>20</sup> that wine has been given us by the Lord for cheerfulness and for medicinal purposes. “Give strong drink to him who is perishing and wine to him whose life is bitter” (Proverbs 31:6). “Wine can mitigate bitterness and gloominess and drive away clouds from the brow; thus the Scripture says, ‘Wine makes glad the heart of man’ (Psalm 104:15).

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<sup>19</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XIX, vv. 15-17.

<sup>20</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XIX, vv. 17-18.

Paul also wrote to Timothy, ‘Use a little wine for your stomach and your frequent weaknesses’” (1 Timothy 5:23).

Wine is also good for external medicinal purposes. In treating the man left for dead, the Good Samaritan poured wine and oil on his wounds after applying bandages (Luke 10:34).

But like the covetous, some people are not satisfied with just a little and use God’s gift for drunkenness, rioting and their own self-destruction. Paul contrasts this with being filled with the Spirit. About seven years earlier, he had written to the Romans about how the Kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17).

Other ways of redeeming the time and being filled with the Spirit that Paul mentions are:

- Speaking to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (Ephesians 5:19).
- Singing and psalming in your heart to the Lord (Ephesians 5:19).
- Giving thanks always for all things (Ephesians 5:20).
- Submitting to one another in the fear of God (Ephesians 5:21), that is, out of humility (1 Peter 5:5).

Chrysostom stated<sup>21</sup> that we can use spiritual drink and be filled with the Holy Spirit by singing Psalms. We do this with understanding, not just mouthing the words.

“Do you wish to be cheerful; do you wish to employ the day? I give you spiritual drink. For drunkenness even cuts off the articulate sound of our tongue; it makes us lisp and stammer and distorts the eyes and the whole frame altogether. Learn to sing Psalms and you shall see the delightfulness of the employment. For they who sing psalms are filled with the Holy Spirit as they who sing satanic songs are filled with an unclean spirit.” Chrysostom adds that “singing and psalming in your heart to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:19) refers to doing so with close attention and understanding, and not just mouthing the words while our heart is roaming elsewhere.”

“And is then this Spirit within us? Yes, indeed, within us! When we have driven away lying, bitterness, fornication, uncleanness and covetousness from our souls, when we have become kind, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, when there is no coarse jesting, when we have rendered ourselves worthy of it, what is there to hinder the Holy Spirit from coming and lighting upon us? Not only will He come unto us, but He will fill our hearts; and when we have so great a light kindled within us, then will the way of virtue be no longer difficult to attain, but will be easy and simple”.

### **Giving Thanks for All Things – Ephesians 5:20**

Another aspect of being filled with the Spirit is thankfulness. The Greek word meaning to give thanks (*eucharisteo*) has been transliterated into English as the word Eucharist referring to the Lord’s Supper. When the Lord first instituted the Lord’s Supper, He used the same terms: giving thanks (*eucharisteo*) over it and blessing it (Matthew 26:26-39, Mark 14:22-26, Luke 22:15-

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<sup>21</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XIX, vv. 18-21.



20). Following the Lord's Supper, Jesus and the Twelve sang a hymn before leaving for Gethsemane (Matthew 26:30, Mark 14:26). This hymn was probably part of the liturgy that was sung after the Passover meal.

But Paul said to give thanks for all things, not just those that we consider blessings. Remembering the story of Job, there were things going on that Job had no knowledge of. The Lord had pointed out Job's righteousness to Satan; but Satan had challenged the Lord's judgment (Job 1:8-11, 2:3-5). Satan was allowed to afflict Job with every evil imaginable such that Job was destitute and in great pain (Job 1:13-19, 2:7-13). Yet Job's words were "Blessed be the Name of the Lord" (Job 1:21).

John Chrysostom stated<sup>22</sup>, "If you give thanks when you are in comfort and in affluence, in success and in prosperity, there is nothing great, nothing wonderful in that. Compare this to a man giving thanks when he is in afflictions, in anguish, in discouragement". As an example, one might recall Paul and Silas, broken and bleeding and sitting in a Philippian jail, but praying and singing hymns to God – at midnight (Acts 16:23-25).

Chrysostom encourages<sup>23</sup> us to give thanks even for hell itself and for the things that we don't want. Hell can be good as a bridle on our hearts; some things we receive keep us from sin.

"Surely it is a thing beneficial to those who attend to it, when the dread of hell is laid like a bridle on our hearts. Let us therefore give thanks not only for blessings which we see, but also for those which we don't see and for those which we receive against our will. Many are the blessings He bestows upon us without our desire, without our knowledge". In this regard, we need to remember how the story of Job ended. Job benefited greatly from his affliction both in this world and in the age to come (Job 42:10-17, James 5:10:11).

Chrysostom also encourages<sup>24</sup> us to increase our thanksgiving whenever poverty, sickness or disasters affect us.

"Let us increase our thanksgiving when evil comes our way; thanksgiving, I mean, not in words nor in tongue, but in deeds and in works, in mind and in heart". Chrysostom reminded us of the words of our Lord and of the Prophet Isaiah: "What man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him" (Matthew 7:9, 11). "Can a woman forget her nursing child and have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget you but I will not forget you" (Isaiah 49:15).

### **Submitting to One Another – Ephesians 5:21**

Paul's statement, "submitting to one another in the fear of God" belongs Ephesians 5:20 as a fourth part of the definition of being filled with the Spirit. [The other three are (1) speaking to

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<sup>22</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XIX, vv. 18-21.

<sup>23</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XIX, vv. 18-21.

<sup>24</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XIX, vv. 18-21.

one another in Psalms; (2) singing in your heart and (3) giving thanks always]. To illustrate this, the Lord had taken a young child in His arms. (According to tradition the child was Ignatius of Antioch, later the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bishop of Antioch). “Whoever receives one of these little children in My Name receives Me; and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me.” The point was that “if anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant (literally deacon: Greek *diakonos*) of all” (Mark 9:35, 37). The above statements Jesus made following a dispute between the Twelve over who would be the greatest.

A little later, James and John (along with their mother Salome – Matthew 20:20) asked Jesus to grant that they might sit on His right and left in His Glory. This caused another dispute among the Twelve, to which Jesus replied: “You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant (Greek: *diakonos*). And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served (*diakoneo*) but to serve (*diakoneo*) and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:42-45). Thus, submitting to one another is not a new teaching that Paul came up with, but is just part of basic humility.

Chrysostom pointed out<sup>25</sup> that mutual submission – all waiting upon one another – makes for a much happier, more pleasant life than a forced domination by one individual including fear and apprehension. What then if someone does not choose to submit to us?

“Continue to submit to him, not simply yielding, but really submitting. Entertain this feeling towards all, as if all were your masters. For you will soon have all as your slaves. This is ‘subjecting yourselves one to another in the fear of Christ’ in order that we may subdue all the passions, be servants of God and preserve the love we owe to one another”.

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<sup>25</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XIX, vv. 18-21.