

October 28-9, 2006

1. Do you put things off, despite the old saying, “don’t put off until tomorrow what you can do today”? I think we can all say that we all do this, and sometimes we do it with respect to unimportant things, but at other times we do it with something really important. We say to ourselves, “someday I am going to learn Spanish,” or “someday I am going to go to Niagara Falls,” but that day never comes. We never learn Spanish; we never go to Niagara Falls. But often we do get around to doing the less important things. We finally paint the kitchen; we finally get to clean the bedroom.

2. I had a similar experience when I looked at the readings for today. I saw two words which I have often thought I should know more about: Ephraim and Melchizedek. So I decided finally to look them up. Let me share with you what I learned. Ephraim is the name Joseph gave to one of his two sons. The other boy was named Manasseh. It is also the name of the northern section of the land of Israel. After King Solomon, so in the 900s, the land of the Jews was divided into two kingdoms, that of the north and that of the south. In our reading today Ephraim may refer to this Northern Kingdom, because Jeremiah is talking about the time when the Assyrians conquered this northern Kingdom in the 700s but then

allowed a few people to return. The same thing happened 200 years later, so in the 500s, when the Babylonians conquered the southern kingdom but then allowed some of the people to return to Jerusalem. That return is described in our responsorial psalm for today, psalm 126.

3. The other word I looked up was Melchizedek. Who was he? He is described as the king of Salem, and Salem is another name for the city of Jerusalem, but Jerusalem before it became the capital of the Jews. It also means peace. Abraham meets this king on his way back from victory in a battle, and Melchizedek gives him bread and wine and blesses him because he is not only a king but a priest. Our Letter to the Hebrews speaks of Jesus as being a priest according to the order of Melchizedek because Jesus' priesthood was like that of Melchizedek in that it was not hereditary. Jesus was not of the priests who descended from Aaron. Jesus, like Melchizedek, is priest not by reason of descent but by immediate divine appointment, and Abraham, the ancestor of the Jewish priesthood by descent, recognized the priesthood of Melchizedek by giving him gifts and receiving his blessing. This may not mean much for us today, but it was important for the author of this Letter to the Hebrews. He had to explain why Jesus could be called a priest even though he did not belong to the priestly tribe of Levi

whose members were priests simply because they had been born into that tribe.

4. So much for these words. At least we now have some idea of what they may mean, and we may be a little less embarrassed by our ignorance when we meet these words again. But I don't think this little bit of knowledge helps our devotion a great deal. Let us look, then, at the Gospel story for that. The blind beggar Bartimaeus sitting by the roadside hears that Jesus of Nazareth is passing by and begins to cry out for help, and his cry is so insistent that Jesus hears it and stops and tells those around himself to call him. They do so and Bartimaeus comes. What do you want, Jesus asks him, and Bartimaeus answers: I want to see. Jesus sees that this man has faith in him, and so he says to him: Go your way, your faith has saved you. And immediately, we are told, Bartimaeus received his sight.

5. In this miracle story faith produces the gift of vision. In our own lives faith is what gives us eyes to see God working in our lives. The eyes of faith, I suppose, we could say. This Gospel of Mark presents the disciples of Jesus as being blind to his own identity, blind to the fact that he could be himself only by suffering and dying. They don't see that, or they don't want to see it. Instead

they ask for first places in his kingdom. And so Mark surrounds the three scenes in which he tries to tell his disciples that he is going to have to suffer by two stories of blind men who receive their sight through their faith.

6. What is the lesson for us? Each of us has to answer that question in a different way. But all of us can share the same request, that of Bartimaeus: Lord, I want to see, or, put differently, Lord, that I may see. Let us pray for sight, for insight in the living of our lives, that we be where the Lord wants us to be, that we may do what the Lord wants us to do, that we may think the way the Lord wants us to think, even that we may feel the way the Lord wants us to feel. Lord, that I may see. Lord, that I may have faith in your love and your guidance of my life, for only when I believe in these can I really see my world and myself.