

## **Trinity XXII, Ordinary Sunday 30B**

### **Master let me see again – Prayer of Lamentation**

When we think there's something wrong with someone we know, we usually ask, "What's the matter with you today?" I ask similar questions from clients that I counsel during the week as I begin a session: "What have you been going through?" These open-ended questions allow the other person to express in language what pain, suffering, or challenge they are experiencing.

However, there are people whose suffering is so extreme that they cannot speak. We have all seen images, and videos, on our newsfeeds, of people whose families have been killed, whose homes have been destroyed, and who have been left isolated in their suffering. They sit on the ground, head in hands, preoccupied with their pain and loss, hearts broken, lost for words. Their suffering has left them numb and mute. Before this type of extreme suffering, we feel helpless; it seems senseless to say anything at all.

The first step towards overcoming any human suffering is to find a language that leads the sufferer out of silence, a language for pain, fear and loss. This is why the simple question "Are you ok?" is a good start to help someone begin to deal with their suffering or depression.

One of the great teachings of the biblical tradition is that people should express their suffering in lamentation, not repress it in brooding silence. Remaining silent is remaining hopeless, stuck in our own little headspace, we do this, when there is no belief or hope in the possibility of positive change. It is not surprising, therefore, that there are so many prayers of lamentation throughout the history of God's people and throughout the scriptures, including the Book of Lamentations. Lamentations are cries from the heart, shouts of suffering, groans of anguish, and screams for help. They are written on a bed of

pain, but they express the hope that things will change, that God will listen. Lamentation is the voice of suffering.

The Psalm 6 :

*“Have mercy on me, Lord, I have no strength...*

*I am exhausted with my groaning;*

*Every night I drench my pillow with tears;*

*I bedew my bed with weeping.*

*My eyes waste away with grief...*

*I have grown old and surrounded by my foes...*

These biblical expressions of suffering are intended to be more than self-expression; they are made out of the hope and faith that things can change in the future. Lamentation, therefore, is not pessimistic; it refuses to remain powerless and passive, so it expresses its longing for change. The prayer of lamentation makes a bridge between silent endurance and change; this is vividly portrayed in today’s Gospel.

Jesus is leaving Jericho with his disciples and a large crowd, probably pilgrims traveling to the holy city for Passover. When the blind beggar Bartimaeus hears Jesus is so near, he shouts his prayer of lamentation: **“Son of David, have pity on me.”** Some of those following Jesus resent this disturbance, so they tell this one-man-uproar to keep quiet. No permission to scream; no permission to find a language for suffering. They represent the school of thought that is content to leave the afflicted to suffer in silence, no doubt in the belief that this is a religious response to suffering.

Without the capacity to communicate his suffering, the blind man will continue to inhabit his world of darkness. He knows that if there is going to be change, he must communicate his loss to Jesus. So he screams his lamentation, even louder – **“Son of David, have pity on me”** It stops Jesus in his tracks and

he tells the crowd to minister to this blind man by calling him over. The crowd changes its tune: “Courage,” they say. “Get up; he is calling you.” Jesus asks the question of questions: **“What do you want me to do for you?”** When the blind man finds a language for his loss, and expresses his need for sight, Jesus heals him and compliments him for a faith that saved him. Saved by faith, he uses his new sight to follow Jesus along the road.

Thus, the healing in the Gospel takes place as a result of the prayer of lamentation, a prayer that comes from the heart. That prayer expresses the pain and the faith of Bartimaeus; he believed in a God who pays attention. Why bother screaming if you believe that no one is there to pay attention? Bartimaeus focused on Jesus, ignoring all other advice. He gave his unmixed attention to Jesus, And Jesus returned the compliment.

There is also a psychological insight in this story, the first step toward healing from any suffering is the positive cognition that you can be healed and find joy again. The more you entertain a positive belief, the more neural networks will strengthen this belief in your brain, increasing the possibility of a desired change, this is expressed by the idiom “If there is a will, there is a way”

If we have been brought up to believe that the religious response to suffering should be silence and passivity, then we will find the prayer of lamentation a subversive act. But the loss of that prayer is the loss of a language for our suffering, the loss of a faith that desires to speak honestly to God – God is big enough to handle our emotions by the way, he won’t have a bad day if we honestly express our suffering to him. When Jesus himself, reaches the end of his road, he will use the prayer of lamentation in Gethsemane. There, on the ground, he will find a language for his own pain, loss, and fear. The Good News is that the Father hears that prayer of Jesus and gives him the strength and courage

needed to endure his passion. The prayer of lamentation is, therefore, not a useless exercise; it is a prayer that reaches the heart of God.

Therefore, let's listen to Jesus asking each one of us the same question today: **What do you want me to do for you?** What is our prayer of lamentation for him today? Apart from whatever we need at this time let's also ask together with Bartimaeus, for NEW SIGHT, for new spiritual insights, to follow the Lord.

Just as Bartimaeus, his sight restored, 'followed (Jesus) upon the way', so we will continue to follow him 'along the way' of our own lives only if we know our need of his healing grace in our lives and for a 'sight' that Jesus alone can give. Bartimaeus, the blind beggar, becomes a model of discipleship and faith.