

**Homily for the Annual Third Circuit Red Mass
The Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time - Cycle B**

October 28, 2018

**Saint Boniface Church
Edwardsville, Illinois**

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Reverend Fathers, Deacons, consecrated religious, members of the judiciary, fellow attorneys and practitioners of the legal profession, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ: it is good to be here as we gather to celebrate the Annual Third Circuit Red Mass for the St. Thomas More Lawyers Guild of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois. We call this a “Red Mass” because red is the color symbolizing the fire of the Holy Spirit, whose wisdom we implore to guide the work and decisions of our legal professionals and civic officials in the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government.

Our Red Mass this year takes place with our nation’s mid-term elections coming up in a little over a week. Once again our nation finds itself confronted with violence and threats of violence as police on Friday arrested a suspect for allegedly sending more than a dozen bombs around the country, and yesterday in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, at least eight souls lost

their lives in a shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue. I join my voice with that of Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, who condemned all acts of violence and hate, saying in a statement yesterday, "Violence as a response to political, racial, or religious differences must be confronted with all possible effort. God asks nothing less of us. He begs us back to our common humanity as His sons and daughters." We stand in solidarity with the Jewish community as we commend to our Lord the victims, including first responders, and we pray for the consolation of their families. May Almighty God be with them and bring them comfort at this tragic time.

It is fitting, therefore, that we make prayers for peace and an end to violence in our nation and around the world a focal point for our prayers in today's Red Mass. Today's passage from Saint Mark's Gospel demonstrates the power of crying out to Jesus in prayer.

Jesus is going to Jerusalem during the final week of his earthly life and passes through Jericho. He has much on his mind as he is facing confrontation with religious and Roman authorities. Then he hears one blind beggar, Bartimaeus, crying out. Bartimaeus recognizes Jesus as no ordinary prophet. Even though the crowd tries to silence him, Bartimaeus will not be

silenced and he asks Jesus to let him see again. When Jesus calls Bartimaeus to him, he leaps up and runs to Jesus. Bartimaeus knows that a major change is about to happen in his life and he anticipates it with enthusiasm, joy and hope. He is healed of his blindness.

Bartimaeus is a special figure in Mark's Gospel. For a start, he has a name, unlike many other anonymous people healed by Jesus. Also he takes the initiative after grasping who Jesus is. Bartimaeus, despite his blindness, sees the messianic and divine dimensions of Jesus' identity, and he discerns that Jesus is compassionate and able to show mercy and to heal. He persists despite hindrances. When the crowd rebukes Bartimaeus for calling out, demanding that a blind beggar must be silent, Bartimaeus yells "all the louder" until Jesus hears him. Bartimaeus expects a transformation. When he is summoned by Jesus he tosses aside his cloak. He clearly expects to regain his sight, for a blind beggar would ordinarily do well to keep his possessions close at hand. He obviously expects a change in his status. Bartimaeus confidently expects that he will no longer sit on his garment, dependent upon handouts from passers-by.

In contrast, the disciples did not grasp the true identity of Jesus. After Jesus predicted His passion three times and the disciples misunderstand what He was saying or why He was saying it, this section of the Gospel closes with the story of a blind man who sees with the eyes of faith. This is typical of the Gospel of Mark, where those who should know Jesus do not, and those who have no reason to know Him do. Ironically this blind man becomes a disciple and follows Jesus. The disciples of Jesus, who can see physically, are spiritually blind and they drift away. The irony is that Bartimaeus already sees with a clarity that far surpasses Jesus' own disciples. He sees with the eyes of faith, which allows him to see spiritually rather than physically. This is how Bartimaeus could see clearly that Jesus was the Messiah. After receiving his sight, Bartimaeus begins to follow Jesus, which is another way of saying that Bartimaeus becomes a disciple of Jesus.

The story of Bartimaeus is like a blueprint for the ideal disciple: he believes that Jesus is the Messiah, he is called by Jesus, he has faith in Jesus and he experiences Jesus' healing power. The story describes two energies coming together: the energy of Jesus and the energy of the believer. In this Eucharist, may we see clearly that the power of Christ's love satisfies the deepest yearnings of our hearts. May God give us this grace. Amen.