



My role model for Advent this year is Bartimaeus.

The centuries before Jesus, the Messiah, was born were a time of longing, a time of waiting and anticipation. A Messiah was promised; when would he come? We get a sense of this in the Gospel on Gaudete Sunday:

“Now, the people were filled with expectation ... All were asking in their hearts whether John might be the Christ.”

Of course, we are not waiting in the same way: Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, the Messiah, came. That was 2000 years ago, and different questions confront us: how do you long, how do you anticipate, how do you wait for something that has already happened? What is Advent about in 2021? How should we spend these weeks as we wait to celebrate the anniversary of the birth of Jesus? Is there something more than buying gifts and sending cards, decorating our homes, and planning for gatherings with family and friends? And then there is the ultimate question: “What do you want for Christmas this year?” We all feel a little stressed by Advent, and that doesn’t seem right.

I offer you Bartimaeus as way to approach Christmas.

You will remember Bartimaeus from a gospel we heard just a few weeks ago, on the 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time. Here is a condensed version.

As Jesus was leaving Jericho ... Bartimaeus, a blind man, sat by the side of the road, begging.”

He began to cry out: “Jesus, son of David, have pity on me!”

Jesus said to him in reply: “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man replied: “I want to see.”

Jesus told him “Go on your way; your faith has saved you.” Immediately he received his sight and followed him.

Bartimaeus is displaying true humility. I am not thinking of the usual sort of humility: self-denial and self-deprecation, being quiet, meek, and passive, hoping to not be noticed. I am thinking of a different version of humility: down to earth, authentic, self-aware, achieving interior honesty. This is the kind of humility that leads us to the Lord so that we can be made whole. Bartimaeus knows himself: he is blind and highly likely to get lost if he tries to find his way on his own. And, he knows that he can’t change that reality.

Like us, Bartimaeus lived at a time when the Messiah had arrived and was actively at work. And so he goes and sits by the side of the road (he anticipates, he waits). He cries out to the one who can make him whole (he longs to be healed). And, he is confident: “Master, I want to see.” The gospel says that Bartimaeus followed Jesus from that day on. No longer did he get lost; he knew the way forward. Can you imagine what he had to say about his encounter with Christ? I wonder if the second reading On Gaudete Sunday offers a clue:



Brothers and sisters: Rejoice in the Lord always.

I say it again: Rejoice!

The Lord is near ... Make your requests known.

Many things blind us and make it difficult for us to follow the Lord. How do we long, how do we anticipate, how do we wait for something that has already happened? Perhaps this Advent we should work on humility and be honest with ourselves and our need for the healing that only the Lord can provide. Then, wherever we are on the road of life, perhaps we should sit down and call on the Lord. When He comes to where we are and asks "What do you want me to do for you" be bold and say "Master, I want to see."

That's what I want for Christmas: to see.

Deacon Steven Koop

