

30th Sunday Ordinary Time Oct 25, 2009 Year B

Jr 31:7-9; Ps 126:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6; Hb 5:1-6; Mk 10:46-52

Our readings this Sunday express the humble and needy condition of those who clamor for redemption, for God's help. After all their experiences and sufferings and purifications, the Israelites in the period after the Babylonian Exile developed a spirituality of poverty (the expression "poor in spirit" in Mt 5:3 expresses this, as do references to "lowliness" in Mary's Magnificat, Lk 1:48, 52 and Jesus' "meek, humble" heart in Mt 11:29). Thus salvation, redemption, was expressed in terms of God the Good Shepherd gathering blind and lame sheep in his arms, as in our first reading. The fundamental disposition to approach God is one of consciousness of our weakness and need; this is what Paul tried to instill in the insecure and thus competitive and arrogant Corinthians when he appealed to them to consider that God called to the Church people who did not have the most impressive credentials, 1 Cor 1:26-29.

Ps 126 is the great psalm of the "change of fortunes" hoped for by Israel. There is a Hebrew verb, *shuv*, which basically means "to turn." This is the verbal root behind the important biblical concepts of "conversion," which means turning to God, or even God's returning to the people after their returning to him! It also signifies return to the holy land as the place of God's presence and thus blessings, and it also means "change of fortunes" and end of exile or captivity. Try looking at various translations of Ps 126:1 and you will see that these various meanings are to be found.

The Hebrews reading is powerful. It presents us with the "weakness" of Christ (see also 2 Cor 13:4). Christ assumed our weakness and recoiled at the prospect of his enormous suffering, freely undertaken for us (see Jn 10:18). This was his holy sacrifice which "ordained" him as High Priest; "perfection," in Hb 5:9, means both the "unblemished" condition of acceptable (animal) sacrifices of the Old Testament (or the like the Passover lamb in Ex 12:5) and "priestly ordination," as in Ex 29:9.

We get in Mark's gospel a real glimpse of a poor sheep waiting for the Davidic Good Shepherd (see Ezek 34:23), the blind beggar Bartimaeus. Uncouth and without shame or false propriety, he starts yelling when he hears that Jesus of Nazareth, the "Son of David" (Messiah) is passing by, even though he is told to shut up. "Have pity (or compassion, *eleison*) on me!" Suddenly, he is now told the opposite: "Take courage, he's calling you!" He is quickly healed and saved, and begins to follow Jesus.