

by Joan Mitchell, CSJ

Place an open bible, a lighted candle, and things beautiful in creation at the center of your group.

LEADER: Loving God, we are Jesus' disciples in our world today.

ALL: Amazed and afraid at God's action in our lives.

LEADER: We walk Jesus' way.

ALL: Amazed and afraid at God's action in our lives.

LEADER: We ask to see as Jesus sees.

ALL: To welcome others into our lives as he does.

LEADER: Help us find ways to welcome even the stranger, even the sick, even the least.

ALL: Let us see with eyes of faith. Amen.

Seeing is first of all physiological, a capacity of our bodies. Our eyes feed our brains much of what we know and notice—blue sky at morning, mackerel clouds that warn of storms, our own faces in puddles and mirrors, sadness clouding someone's face, joy lighting it up.

Insight sees beyond appearances, makes connections, and becomes conscious, spiritual activity. The conscious eye sees beyond skin color or façade. Creation becomes transparent and sacramental. We see God's presence in Earth and its life. We see the whole in every part. In the vast web of life in which we live, move, and have our

SUNDAY

by SUNDAY

being, we read the first book of God's revelation.

According to the bible, awe and wonder are the beginning of wisdom. We experience awe in the birth of a child, the marriage of two people in love, the vastness of the sea, or the beauty of a prairie in bloom. These experiences of awe hint of God and the sacredness of the world in which we live. Daily we integrate what we see into the ongoing meaning and purpose of our lives.

At age four St. Kateri Tekakwitha lost her Christian Algonquin mother and Mohawk father to smallpox, which also weakened her sight. Her uncle, a Mohawk chief, took her into his longhouse and called her Tekakwitha, One Who Walks Groping Her Way.

Perhaps her mother infected Tekakwitha with a desire to become a Christian, but not until the Jesuits that followed the fur traders into upstate New York established a permanent mission in her village did she have a chance. Father Lamberville found her a natural Christian, instructed her, baptized her at Christmas in 1679, and gave her the name Kateri (Katherine).

Like Bartimaeus in Sunday's gospel, Kateri sees with insight.

Learning about Jesus' suffering for others made sense of her life of hardship and poor health. She spent Sundays at Mass and in prayer. She brought her Mohawk endurance and composure to spending long hours in prayer.

Kateri met Ursuline sisters in Montreal on her 200-mile trek to live in a Christian village. They awakened in her a desire for a life of prayer and virginity. She received first communion on Easter at the new village and made a vow of perpetual virginity the next year, 1679. Many Mohawk people became Christians after her death at 24.

● **In what are you groping your way, looking for insight?**



Icon/Robert Lentz

GOSPEL

Jesus heals a man who wants to see.



NARRATOR: As Jesus was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a large crowd, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus (son of Timaeus) was sitting by the road. When he heard that Jesus of Nazareth was coming, he began to shout.

BARTIMAEUS: Jesus! Son of David! Have mercy on me!

NARRATOR: Many of the people scolded Bartimaeus and told him to be quiet. But he shouted even more loudly.

BARTIMAEUS: Son of David, have mercy on me!

NARRATOR: Jesus stopped.

JESUS: Call him.

PEOPLE IN CROWD: Get up. Jesus is calling you.

NARRATOR: Bartimaeus threw off his cloak, jumped up, and came to Jesus.

JESUS: What do you want me to do for you?

BARTIMAEUS: Teacher, I want to see again.

JESUS: Go, your faith has made you well.

NARRATOR: At once Bartimaeus was able to see and followed Jesus up the road.

Mark 10.46-52

and brash hopes as they follow Jesus. These followers show us discipleship as a process of growth.

Shortly before Sunday's gospel passage, Mark vividly describes Jesus and his company of disciples on the road to Jerusalem. "Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed and those who followed were afraid" (10.32). As they travel with Jesus, the disciples are also making a transforming journey within. Their vision of Jesus is somewhere between blurry and clear, their feelings a mix of awe and fear, their transformation in process.

● How do you characterize yourself as a disciple—more like Peter or more like Bartimaeus?

In Sunday's gospel a blind beggar models the enthusiastic and unabashed acceptance of Jesus that Mark's gospel hopes from every hearer of the story. Bartimaeus has not traveled and talked with Jesus about his teaching and healing. But as he sits outside the Jericho city gates, the beggar must have heard others talk about Jesus. As soon as Bartimaeus is aware Jesus is near, he shouts out a greeting and demands to be heard.

"Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!" In these words Bartimaeus recognizes Jesus as the messiah, the long expected king from David's royal line. He persists in yelling this profession of faith at the top of his lungs. He refuses to let the crowd silence him. His words echo Peter's answer to Jesus' question two chapters earlier in the narrative, "Who do you say that I am?"

Who can see clearly now?

Sunday's gospel portrays the blind beggar Bartimaeus as an ideal disciple. He hears about Jesus, believes in him, and follows unhesitatingly.

His story concludes the section in Mark's gospel in which Jesus leads his disciples to Jerusalem. Mark ends this section with a story of a blind man just as he began it, but the two stories picture very different responses to Jesus.

Jesus can only partially heal the earlier blind man at Bethsaida on whose eyes he applies spit and on whom he lays hands (Mark 8.22-26). The man opens his eyes and sees people,

but they look like walking trees. Jesus must lay his hands on the man a second time before he can see clearly. This two-stage healing foreshadows two stages in the lives of Jesus' disciples.

Immediately following, Jesus asks his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" Peter answers for the group, "You are the messiah." Then Jesus predicts he will suffer and die, and Peter objects.

Like the man who had to be healed in two stages, Peter sees Jesus as a victorious messiah but not a suffering messiah. Mark pictures Peter and Jesus' earliest disciples struggling with fear



“The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person’s face” (Laudato Si’ #233).

Bartimaeus recognizes that Jesus is the messiah; that is what the title “son of David” means. What does all his yelling accomplish for Bartimaeus? He gets Jesus’ attention, tells Jesus that he wants to see, and receives his sight.

Even before Jesus heals his blindness, Bartimaeus throws away his cloak, in which he probably collected the money passersby threw his way. He accepts the call to discipleship before Jesus gives it. He throws off the trappings of a life of begging and signals his readiness to follow Jesus.

His desire to see transforms Bartimaeus. Their desire for status impedes the vision of James and John. His desire for belongings makes the rich young

man walk away from Jesus. In Mark, the blind beggar who sees with eyes of faith, becomes the model follower. He has nothing to leave behind as he follows a new vision for his life.

- What frees you to embrace Jesus wholeheartedly?
- What keeps you from throwing away your cloak?
- What do you persist in asking Jesus?
- How can you be part of the answer?

Bartimaeus believes as a result of hearing others talk about Jesus. In this way Bartimaeus is like the audience for whom Mark writes the first gospel 40 years after Jesus’ death and resurrection. They, like all of us ever since,

believe on the testimony of the gospel word.

Like many of Jesus’ followers, Bartimaeus is also poor and inconsequential, living as a beggar on the roadside of his society. He is an outsider like the tax collectors and prostitutes with whom Jesus often ate. His example tells us that we cannot be outsiders in Jesus’ crowd. He welcomes all.

In Mark’s gospel several outsiders model the faith response to which the author calls us readers. The Syrophenician woman, a foreigner, believes Jesus can free her daughter from an unclean spirit and seeks him out (7.24-30).

Another Gentile, the Gerasene demoniac whom Jesus frees from legions of evil spirits, proclaims his healing throughout the Gentile Ten Cities area (5.1-20). The leper Jesus heals in Mark 1.40-45 spreads the good news of his healing all over Galilee. From the beginning people hear about Jesus from those already believing and living his word.

- When has an outsider shown you what a follower of Jesus should be like?

DO SOMETHING

CHARITY **JUSTICE**

- Explore current political issues from the perspective of Catholic social teaching at Networklobby.org. Issues include tax justice, living wages, and family-friendly workplaces as well as access to democracy, to healthcare, to citizenship, and to housing.

**“I will gather them,”
says the Holy One.**

Jeremiah lives and prophesies in one of Israel’s worst eras, the final decades of the kingdom. The king and many people of the nation regard Jeremiah as a traitor because he cannot assure them that God will preserve the city and temple from destruction as the prophet Isaiah had promised a hundred years earlier. Jeremiah smashes pottery to show what the growing power of the Babylonians will do to their nation. He wears a yoke to show Israel will become Babylon’s vassal.

In 598 B.C. the Babylonians lay siege to Jerusalem and take many citizens captive. The struggle continues until 587 when the Babylonians destroy the city and temple and take most able-bodied workers captive, scattering the people to “the ends of the world.”

Jeremiah suffers with his people through the sieges and defeat. As destruction looms with increasing certainty, the prophet speaks just as confidently of God’s faithfulness. He primes his people’s hopes that God will find and save them, even scattered to other nations.

The prophet describes the people shouting for joy and exulting before other nations because their God has saved them

and brought them back from the ends of the world. In these words we glimpse Israel at worship.

The community is to “sing aloud with gladness, to raise shouts for the leader of the nations.” Shouting, loud singing, the sounds of trumpet and harp, timbrel and dance, strings, pipes, loud crashing cymbals are part of Israel’s celebrative worship. The psalms again and again describe a worshipping community which expresses its belief, its joys and sorrows, its hopes and fears, in the form of song, dance, music, proclamation.

Shout for joy.

**Shout with joy for Jacob,
exult at the head of the nations;
proclaim your praise and say:
“Save, O God, your people,
the remnant of Israel.”**

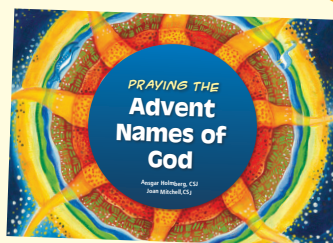
**See, I will bring them back
from the land of the north;
I will gather them
from the ends of the world
with the blind and the lame
in their midst,
the mothers and those with child.**

Jeremiah 31:7-9

- Who speaks of God’s faithfulness today and gives you hope in the midst of change?
- How do you pray besides in words?
- What is the spirit of your congregation at worship? What might enhance the ways you express your praise?

GIFT ALERT

Small faith-sharing study groups will delight in using *Praying the Advent Names of God* to live messianic expectations that culminate in Jesus’ birth. The seven O Antiphons of the Divine Office recall God’s history with the people of Israel. Art and prayer invite insight into the abiding presence of God’s incarnate Word with us.



PRAY

LEADER: We will close with a brief, guided meditation. Close your eyes and imagine Jesus asking you as he asked Bartimaeus, “What do you want me to do for you?” What do you ask for?

Pause for a minute.

LEADER: What steps can you take toward what you ask of Jesus?

Pause for a minute.

LEADER: Lastly, imagine that your request is granted. How do you respond?

Pause.

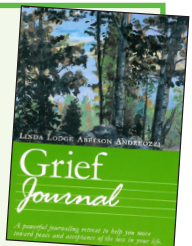
LEADER: Let any of us who are comfortable doing so share what we ask of Jesus.

Exchange a sign of peace.



Joan Mitchell, CSJ, editor of Sunday by Sunday, holds a Masters in Theological Studies from Harvard Divinity School and a Ph.D. in New Testament from Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN.

Linda Andreozzi’s story of loss, grief, and recovery inspires the journaling questions and exercises in this book. Linda’s experience of loss makes this book helpful in coping with other kinds of loss—job, home, faith.



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