

**Homily of His Excellency Archbishop Christophe Pierre,
Apostolic Nuncio to the United States of America
Wednesday of the Sixth Week in Ordinary Time
The Catholic Students Center at the University of Maryland
College Park, Maryland
February 16, 2022**

My Dear Friends in Christ,

As the Apostolic Nuncio, the representative of the Holy Father to the United States, I greet you in the name of Pope Francis and express his spiritual closeness and paternal affection for each of you, assuring you also of his prayers. The Pope has a special place in his heart for young people, and you have a special role to play in the life of the Church. I thank your chaplain, Father Conrad Murphy, for his kind invitation to join you.

Young people have a special role in the Church today. In today's Gospel, taken from the eighth chapter of Mark, some people bring a blind man to Jesus, begging Him to touch him. We can think of other Gospel scenes, for example, when the paralytic is brought on a stretcher to see Jesus and is lowered down to Jesus from the roof, in which friends come to the aid of a sick person.

Although at times in our faith journey, we feel like the blind man, we must begin to see the greatness of the call to be the ones who bring those who cannot see the way, who do not yet have faith, or those blinded by sin to Jesus. To be a friend like this is to be a missionary, and the Pope wants us to be a missionary Church that goes forth and that leads others to see by the light of faith and to experience the joy of the Gospel.

To bring another person to Jesus to receive healing is an act of true love and of genuine friendship. The Gospel says they *begged Jesus to touch him*. To beg is to intercede – to pray, and the Church does this constantly. How many of your peers are relying on your prayers? How many lives can you touch by lifting another person up in prayer?! But, in the Gospel, it is Jesus whom they ask to touch the blind man. What does it mean to be touched by the Lord?

The blind man must allow Jesus to touch and to heal him. He appears to trust the testimony of his friends that Jesus can heal Him. His friends did not take him to a doctor rather they brought him to Jesus who could offer deep healing. For us to ask the Lord to touch another person who is sick, who has lost his or her way is to say, "Take care of this person, one of those for whom You came into the world, for whom You suffered upon the Cross, one of those to be redeemed, one of those who needs your Father's mercy and love."

Jesus can hardly refuse such a request *He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village*. Today's Gospel is unique because it is the only instance in which Jesus performs a healing miracle in stages. Usually, He heals by His word or by a simple touch. This time Jesus establishes a deep, personal contact with the man, taking him by the hand, recalling the Old Testament theme that God Himself leads His people by the hand (cf. Is. 41:13; Jer 31:32). This gesture reminds us that our following, our discipleship, and our healing needs to be given over to His guidance.

Jesus puts spittle on his eyes and lays hands on him, asking, "*Do you see anything?*" The man reports that he can see men but they look like trees. We learn that he can now see something and that

he knows the difference between men and trees, but his vision is not entirely clear. A second touch is needed; thus, Jesus again lays hands on his eyes. The man could now see *and was restored and could see everything distinctly*.

He was now in a new relationship with God, his friends, and the world around him. This is what faith in Jesus offers – a new vision of the world and of life. The blind man will never be the same now that Jesus has touched His life. The gift he has received must be preserved; this will require a deep commitment on his part.

We too have had our lives touched by Christ, especially in the sacrament of penance. Sometimes our healing is gradual; other times it happens immediately. The need for ongoing conversion is there, yet we should also reflect with gratitude upon those moments in life when Christ touched our hearts and healed us, giving us a new vision of life and faith, which results from being touched by the light of Christ.

In his first encyclical *Lumen Fidei*, Pope Francis wrote: “The light of Christ shines, as in a mirror, upon the face of Christians, as it spreads, it comes down to us, so that we too can share in that vision and reflect that light to others...” (Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Lumen Fidei*, 29 June 2013, 37)

In the first reading, from St. James, the author speaks of looking at ourselves in a mirror. The one who is only a hearer of the Word, but not a doer forgets what he looks like. We are called not be mere hearers of the Word, but doers of the Word. James says positively that when we look into the mirror of the Word of God, we see who we are supposed to be and how we are called to respond to God’s help to change.

When people look in a mirror, and I know young people are always wanting to look good or to have a sense of style, we look at our hair to see if it is straight or if we have missed a spot when shaving, or whether our makeup looks right, or whether our tie is straight. If something doesn’t look right, we try to fix it.

That is the vision that the word of God offers us: to see ourselves as we are and to help us to correct ourselves by bringing ourselves into alignment with God’s word and will. That is the first healing God gives us – sight to see ourselves as we really are and how we ought to be as His children, as Christians.

St. James goes on to suggest that it is not enough to simply see ourselves or to think about who we are called to be. We need to change our behavior, especially by listening more and speaking less, by becoming less impulsive and quick to over-react. He writes: “*Know this, my dear brothers and sisters, everyone should be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger. ... If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, his religion is vain.*”

The Holy Father wants us to be a Church that listens. Many people, rather than being quick to hear and slow to speak, are slow to hear and quick to speak. When we are quick to hear and slow to speak, it shows that we recognize how much we need to learn and teaches us to be docile. It also shows how much we desire to enter into and share in another’s experience, to hear other’s opinions, even more than sharing our own. In today’s Gospel, the friends of the blind man brought him to Jesus. They were attentive to the needs of the other person rather than their own needs. In short, they were sensitive to the call to love, which is at the heart of true religion.

Therefore, let us take a moment of silence not to talk but to listen to God's Word; to see ourselves in its light; to express our gratitude for those times Jesus has touched our lives; and to commit ourselves to listening to God and to others, to being not merely hearers of the Word but *doers of the Word*.