

Revelation 3:14-22**Mark 10:46-end****Introduction**

Can I ask you please to close your eyes for a moment and then to imagine what it would be like if you could never open them again.

That will give us a very small idea of what it might be like not to be able to see

Both of our readings were about blindness. In the Gospel reading we heard about a poor man who could not see and who did everything he could to make the best of it and to regain his sight. In our first reading, however, we heard about people who were blind but didn't realise that they were.

The reading is from one of the six letters to the churches in Revelation. They are letters to the six churches of Asia Minor and each one is an individual message to each church from Jesus and are a sort of inspection, measuring whether they are in a fit state to face the coming crisis of persecution. The letters all follow a similar pattern: a greeting which underlines qualities of Jesus character that relate to the church's situation, Praise for what is good in the church, censure for their deficiencies and finally a promise.

The letter to the church in Laodicea is the only one where there is nothing to praise. Laodicea was a prosperous town. It was a banking centre which was also famous for its textile industry, which manufactured cloths and carpets from the glossy black wool produced in the area, and for its medical school, which was noted for its ear ointment and also for the "Phrygian Powder" used in the making of eye salve. The city was proud of its financial independence and refused the customary imperial aid to restore the damage caused by an earthquake in AD60.

In many ways the church reflected the society in which it was set. It was a church in an affluent society without either hot enthusiasm or cold antagonism towards religious matters. The

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condition of the Laodicean church is extremely unhealthy. Its members have lost all zeal and commitment. If they are not actually against Christ's cause their attitude shows no concern for it. They seem to be filled with languor and boredom.

What is worse they are totally unaware of their pitiful spiritual state. Their attitude is one of self-sufficiency: "I'm all right! I'm doing OK" and self-congratulation: "I am rich and prosperous and have need of nothing" which was simply deceiving themselves. They imagined themselves to be the opposite of what they actually were which in Jesus' opinion was "wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked". Their blindness stopped them making a clear assessment of their own position and needs, which can so often be the case.

When the Titanic was hit by an ice-berg the captain of the ship refused to believe the ship was in trouble till water was ankle deep in the mail room. Only then was it apparent the multi-layered hull had been pierced and the unsinkable ship was going to sink. Ships that could have arrived before the great ocean liner went down weren't summoned until it was too late. He was blinded by his opinion that the ship was unsinkable and so he was unable to see the danger they were in.

Jesus' warning to the Laodicean church is that they are unable to see their true position. They were trusting in earthly riches that in the end would prove to be counterfeit and would not support them in times of persecution. What they needed was a genuine faith not trust in themselves. Genuine faith is immeasurably more precious than all the commodities our society longs for, commodities which will not last and will certainly not sustain us in heaven.

The only ultimate and imperishable wealth is to be rich towards God – to lay up treasures not on earth but in heaven. Jesus Christ himself is the believer's only true treasure; a relationship with Jesus is beyond price and is a priceless treasure that is

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available to us free of charge because he himself has paid the price for us. Jesus wanted the Christians in Laodicea to see that in spiritual terms they were destitute, they had nothing.

In our Gospel reading we meet a blind man called Bartimaeus, a man whose blindness condemned him to a world of darkness and poverty and reduced him to beggar hood. This man's physical condition reflected the spiritual condition of the Christians in Laodicea. The difference was that Bartimaeus recognized that he could not see, he knew he had nothing and he realized he needed help.

He had clearly heard of Jesus and his ability to heal and when he heard that he was passing by he called out to him at the top of his voice, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" The crowd told him to be quiet but he would not – he knew this might be his only chance and so he called all the louder for help and finally he was brought to Jesus.

Jesus' question to Bartimaeus might appear a little strange, "What do you want me to do for you?" Surely it was obvious the man was blind what else would he want from Jesus. But the question went right to the heart of the matter because it investigated what Bartimaeus's expectations were. Did he want financial assistance? Did he want sympathy or help with housing? There was only one thing he wanted from Jesus – his sight. His request for it was evidence that he believed Jesus could provide it and he did. Bartimaeus could see immediately. And, says Mark, he followed Jesus along the road. What a scene that must have been!

What a difference there is in the people described in these two readings. The first set believed they needed nothing, were reliant on themselves and were all but indifferent towards Jesus. The second knew he was desperately needy, looked to Jesus for help and received from him what he desired most of all.

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The key to this is the realization of need. If we do not realize our need we will not look for help – but if we are aware of weakness and need there is a real source of healing and restoration in Jesus. So many of us feel unable to come to Jesus for help because we think we are unacceptable to him. We believe that we are too sinful, too much of a failure, too weak and too badly damaged for him to accept us. The amazing and wonderful thing is that these are the people that Jesus calls to come to him.

He can deal with the sin – he did that when he died upon the cross for us. He has untold wealth at his command to deal with all our needs and he has healing power to deal with all of our weakness, physical and emotional. What Jesus cannot deal with are people who do not acknowledge their need and who are unaware that they need help. Those of us who are aware we are needy, who are tired of our weakness and failure are onto a sure thing because Jesus wants us to come to him exactly as we are and he offers us transformation, healing and new life.

When we know ourselves to be weak and poor, when we feel wretched and when we don't understand what is happening to us our Saviour gives us, sight, riches and healing of the mind. We simply need to come to him and ask him for help.