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If any of you want to be my followers, you must forget about yourself. You must take up your cross and follow me. If you want to save your life, you will destroy it. But if you give up your life for me and for the good news, you will save it. What will you gain, if you own the whole world but destroy yourself? What could you give to get back your soul?

—Mark 8:34–37

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WEEK 26

## Jesus Heals His Disciples' Blindness

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### Guide: "I Want to See"

We come to the point in Jesus' life where his choice becomes clear. He will go to Jerusalem. He will embrace his mission. In the first Gospel to be written, Mark paints a powerful portrait of that journey. It begins as far north as Jesus travels and proceeds south to Jerusalem. It begins with a dramatic symbolic miracle. Jesus heals the blindness of a man but not instantaneously. At first the fellow begins to see, but his vision is distorted. When Jesus touches the man's eyes a second time and heals him and then asks his disciples about their vision of who he is, we understand that this journey is about opening their eyes to see who he really is and what their mission is in following him.

Along the way, Jesus predicts what will happen to him in Jerusalem three times. Three times, they misunderstand it. And three times he tells them what it means to be his disciple. Finally, as they approach the outskirts of Jerusalem, Jesus encounters another blind man and "right away the man could see, and he went down the road with Jesus" (Mark 10:52).

With this journey, this week, our sight is clarified about who Jesus is and how we can go with him to Jerusalem.

After Jesus first tells them what is to come, Peter doesn't see rejection and death in Jerusalem as the mission of Jesus. Jesus tells him he sees like everybody else, not as God sees. Jesus says that if we want to be his disciples, we have to surrender any self-absorption and *take up our cross* with him. Any desperate attempt to avoid giving our lives away is *deadly*. But placing our lives in God's hands is *life giving*. Is our journey on a path to "gain the whole world" and destroy ourselves in the process? Or is it a journey that is free, self-giving, and alive?

After Jesus tells them the second time what they can foresee in Jerusalem, he finds that they are arguing about which of them is the greatest—a very common thing for all of us to do. Jesus tells them that greatness is about *being a servant*. It is about embracing the littlest ones around us—the marginal, the defenseless, the poor. Is this the greatness I seek? What little ones do I embrace? This far down the road, is my vision becoming clearer?

As a good teacher, Jesus tells them what to look for in Jerusalem. This time their vision is still blurred by their desire for the glory that they anticipate in Jerusalem. They are caught up in competition and jealousy. Jesus tells them that their role as servants rules out that kind of behavior. With whom do I compete? How could I be at their service? When Jesus asks, "What do you want me to do for you?" can I respond, "Master, I want to see!"? What happens inside of me when, at this point in my retreat's journey, Jesus says, "Your eyes are healed because of your faith"?

Use the resources this week, particularly the Gospel texts suggested as readings. "For the Journey" offers an in-depth reflection on the week. "In These or Similar Words . . ." offers us words that can help us find our own words to speak with our Lord this week. Consider going to the online Web page of this retreat and sharing the graces you receive.

Our desire is to follow him down the road ahead. We know it will involve carrying our cross, but we now see more clearly that we are with him, as servants of his own mission.

### Some Practical Help for Getting Started This Week

This week we will use all of the means we have practiced since the beginning of the retreat. We get started by reading the texts of the readings for this week. As we begin the week, we want to get these scenes deep inside us.

We will begin each day by recalling what it is we wish to become part of the background of our day and asking for the grace we desire that day. Each morning, for a very brief time, perhaps as we put our slippers or robe on, we will remind ourselves of the focus of our day and will ask *to see Jesus more clearly, to love him more deeply, that we may become one with him more completely in the everyday choices of our lives*. We are focusing on this journey to Jerusalem, and we want it to become concrete for us each day. We are desiring to be able to see and to follow Jesus down that road. So each morning and throughout the day—as I drive to work, begin my day, walk from this place to that, reach for the phone, return home, in the dozens of in-between times of the day—I can say, simply and briefly, "Dear Jesus, I want to be with you. Show me the way today. I so want to see."

It should be easy this week to let these reflections interact with the everyday elements of our lives. It should not be difficult to discover the image of Jesus or his journey deep into the mystery of life and death itself. We can let every experience we encounter in the week, in which there might be some element of conflict, misunderstanding, resistance, dishonesty, even cruelty, show us his path. God calls Jesus to make the journey—to not hold back. God promises Jesus that he will fall into the hands of a loving God. But, along the way, he must let go of self-absorption. He must say "yes" to

the poverty and powerlessness he is experiencing. He is journeying into vulnerability to rejection, even humiliation. Our eyes are opened throughout our day as we recognize *these elements there*. Wherever we encounter moments in our experience—ours or of those around us—experiences of darkness, loss, struggle, pain, violence, injustice, any kind of death at all, we clearly see how deeply Jesus journeys into our human experience.

It should be easy to be attentive to moments of blindness in my heart this week. I can be very sensitive to the times I will feel *resistance* rise up in my heart or stomach. It says, "I don't want to do this." It says, "No." It says, "How do I avoid this?" I can look for the experiences of *competition* I encounter. I can be more highly aware of the dynamics that define what greatness is. I can look at and name the instances of *struggle to be servant for others* in my day.

All of this doesn't take more time. *It takes more attention*. Each evening, as I get ready to go to bed, I can recall the movements and reflections and insights of the day, and I can give thanks. This is so important. With growing familiarity and growing tenderness, I *seal the day* with words that express what I saw and understood about the mission of Jesus and the invitation he makes to me to be with him in this journey of self-donating love.

*Images* and *gestures* are important to support our prayer. Is there a cross or crucifix anywhere in my home? If not, this may be the time to buy one and put it up. If there is one in my home, I can be conscious of looking at it this week and letting it be a symbolic *link* and *support* for the reflections that begin and end my day. This could be a time to use a simple gesture to express, with my body, what I'm trying to say with my words. For one brief *minute* I can open my hands, palms up, and simply hold them there, and let them express all that is in my heart that says surrender, trust, acceptance, desire for intimacy with and togetherness in his mission, the choices

forming within me, my growing "yes." All of us have time for that one minute each day, perhaps several times in the day. It will make a powerful difference in sealing the gifts we are receiving this week of clear vision.

### For the Journey: The Shock of New Vision

There have been some recent studies and articles concerning the difficulties that blind people have when recovering their sight. Living for a long time without being able to visually see allows blind people to adapt in such a way that seeing again is not always the blessing it would seem to be. Recovery of sight means new adapting, and that newness can be frightening and paralyzing.

We are praying this week with Jesus giving physical sight to two different people and a different kind of sight to his disciples. This new sight for them is traumatic as any recovery of physical sight might be.

Jesus is moving slowly to Jerusalem, his destiny, and he reminds his followers that his identity and destiny are wrapped up together with their own. They resist, of course; they have other plans, of course. They are being asked to receive the vision of who they are and what they are called to be and do. We watch them having problems adjusting to this new sense and sight.

We have been receiving, or recovering, sight these past weeks of watching and listening to the Christ of God. The more intimately we allow him to be with us, the more tensions can arise. Attraction and resistance struggle within us, as with his earliest followers. There are implications to his getting into our hearts and lives, as there were with those whom he first called. He makes it very clear that if we really see him, then we will also see ourselves. This awareness can lead to self-cancellation or self-acceptance in him. We have prayed with these familiar tensions these past weeks. Now Jesus ups the ante.

What are we to do with this accepted self? As they moved closer to the place of his final destiny and dignity, the disciples were more inclined to take the Jerusalem bypass and not go into the city-traffic of treachery and betrayal. Jesus has totally accepted himself as the Christ and he hears the call to lay down his life as a gift from his Father. He has made it clear to his followers that their self-donation is the ultimate way of following and extending him and his mission.

So recovery of sight for the disciples and for ourselves, while it is a blessing, takes some deeper recovery-time. Following Jesus into our own Jerusalems of fidelity causes us to question. All our questions of "What?" and "How?" echo the worries of his first questioning friends. The closer we allow him to come, the more we might wonder where the bypass is for us. We pray this week with him and his frail flock. We are there with them and with our truth. Do we want clear sight, recovery of vision, to stay faithful in following him? We pray for the freedom from and the freedom for, and there is much of both for which to pray this week.

Is there still a call out there and in there?

### In These or Similar Words . . .

Dear Jesus,

How blind can they be? I read the stories of the apostles listening to you talk about what it means to enter your kingdom. Entering it means a trial, beating, humiliation, and death. But the apostles quit listening after they heard the word *kingdom*, and the only response they have is to ask whether you will save them special places in this kingdom. I get annoyed at how dense they are and how insensitive.

Where is their support of you? You've just told them how you are going to die, and they ask whether they can get a good spot in the kingdom. But you give the same message over and over: Be a slave, not a master. Be the servant of others. What will you gain if you own the world but destroy yourself? What

could give you back your soul? If you want a place of honor, you must become a slave and serve others.

Oh, wait. You weren't just talking to your apostles? I see once again that these words are also for me. I think I forgot to listen. I think I forgot to support you, my friend, as you turn to me for my love. I feel the increasing tension as you move closer to Jerusalem. I want to be there for you, but I'm not good around conflict, Jesus. I want to blend into the crowd and support you from afar.

Let me listen again. You are asking me to let go of the idea that I can somehow master complete control over my life. You invite me to trust you more and let you help me with my struggles. Every time I am willing to admit that I don't have to do it alone, I move closer to embracing the limitations that bring me closer to you. Every time I accept the humility of my own imperfections, am I not gaining myself instead of the world that rejects you?

I am at a crossroads in my life, dear friend, Jesus. I can't continue my life the way it has been, and that frightens me. I know I want to change, but I struggle with this alone until I remember that you will be with me in this. It means giving up control and trusting you. It means accepting that you are my Lord and giving up the god of perfection and success I have followed for so long.

I come before you with my hands open, asking for help. In the quiet, I feel you with me even if my words are simple ones. Be with me, Lord. I have been so deaf to your message. Heal me. I have been so blind to all the things you have wanted to share with me. Heal me. Thank you for coming into my life in this powerful way.

### Scripture Readings

Mark 8:22-37

Mark 9:30-37

Mark 10:32-52