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Father Cantalamessa on the Priesthood

Pontifical Household Preacher on Sunday's Gospel

ROME, OCT. 27, 2006 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Here is a translation of a commentary by the Pontifical Household preacher, Capuchin Father Raniero Cantalamessa, on the readings from this Sunday's liturgy.

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"Chosen from and for men"

30th Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)

Jeremiah 31:7-9; Hebrews 5:1-6; Mark 10:46-52

The Gospel passage recounts the cure of the blind man of Jericho, Bartimaeus.

Bartimaeus is someone who does not miss an opportunity. He heard that Jesus was passing by, understood that it was the opportunity of his life and acted swiftly. The reaction of those present -- "and many rebuked him, telling him to be silent" -- makes evident the unadmitted pretension of the wealthy of all times: That misery remain hidden, that it not show itself, that it not disturb the sight and dreams of those who are well.

The term "blind" has been charged with so many negative meanings that it is right to reserve it, as the tendency is today, to the moral blindness of ignorance and insensitivity. Bartimaeus is not blind; he is only sightless. He sees better with his heart than many of those around him, because he has faith and cherishes hope. More than that, it is this interior vision of faith which also helps him to recover his external vision of things. "Your faith has made you well," Jesus says to him.

I pause here in the explanation of the Gospel because I am anxious to develop a topic present in this Sunday's second reading, regarding the figure and role of the priest. It is said of a priest first of all that he is "chosen from among men." He is not, therefore, an uprooted being or fallen from heaven, but a human being who has behind him a family and a history like everyone else.

"Chosen from among men" also means that the priest is made of the same fabric as any other human creature: with the emotions, struggles, doubts and weaknesses of everybody else. Scripture sees in this a benefit for other men, not a motive for scandal. In this way, in fact, the priest will be more ready to have compassion, as he is also cloaked in weakness.

Chosen from among men, the priest is moreover "appointed to act on behalf of men," that is, given back to them, placed at their service -- a service that affects man's most profound dimension, his eternal destiny.

St. Paul summarizes the priestly ministry with a phrase: "This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God" (1 Corinthians 4:1). This does not mean that the priest is indifferent to the needs -- including human -- of people, but that he is also concerned with these with a spirit that is different from that of sociologists and politicians. Often the parish is the strongest point of aggregation,

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including social, in the life of a country or district.

We have sketched the positive vision of the priest's figure. We know that it is not always so. Every now and then the news reminds us that another reality also exists, made of weakness and infidelity --- of this reality the Church can do no more than ask forgiveness.

But there is a truth that must be recalled for a certain consolation of the people. As man, the priest can err, but the gestures he carries out as priest, at the altar or in the confessional, are not invalid or ineffective because of it. The people are not deprived of God's grace because of the unworthiness of the priest. It is Christ who baptizes, celebrates, forgives; the priest is only the instrument.

I like to recall in this connection, the words uttered before dying by the country priest of Georges Bernanos: "All is grace."

Even the misery of his alcoholism seems to him to be a grace, because it has made him more merciful toward people. God is not that concerned that his representatives on earth be perfect, but that they be merciful.

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