

- 135 years ago this week, a 28-year-old Frenchman by the name of Charles de Foucauld went to confession. Yet this was no ordinary confession. This confession set the young Charles on a path of heroic virtue that culminated in his martyrdom in North Africa 30 years later.
- Charles had been orphaned at age 6 and raised by his maternal grandfather. When he became of age, he inherited a sizeable fortune, which he used to fund a life of dissipation that eventually brought about the annihilation of his faith.
- Yet as a soldier in the French cavalry, Charles was sent to North Africa, where he came into contact with devout Muslims. As Charles described it, the faith of these Muslims shook him to the core, reigniting something within him long dormant.
- Once back in Paris, Charles began searching for the Lord in earnest, eventually turning to the confessional one late October day 135 years ago to seek God's mercy.
- Afterwards, Charles not only began practicing his Catholic faith again; he eventually joined the Trappists and became a priest.
- Later in life, when asked about his reasons for repenting and turning back to God, Charles said: "As soon as I believed in God, I understood that I could not do otherwise than to live for Him alone." But Charles did more than live for God; He also died for Him.
- After 30 years of working as our Lord's instrument of peace and charity, Bl. Charles de Foucauld was martyred by being shot to death in Africa on December 1, 1916.
- Last Sunday I spoke about God's mercy, of how graciously God will forgive the sins of those who are truly repentant, even the most sinful, and how the gift of God's mercy should lead us to be merciful to others, most especially by our ready forgiveness and works of mercy.
- Blessed Charles de Foucauld is a shining example of someone who did just that. He experienced God's healing and mercy after many years of sinful living, and his experience of God's tender mercy led him to spend the rest of his life practicing works of mercy as a priest.
- Of course, in today's Gospel we see another example of our Lord's healing mercy in the story of Bartimaeus, the blind man of Jericho.
- You can imagine today's Gospel scene: Jesus has been busy preaching and teaching in Jericho, and it's time for him to leave, and a great crowd of people is following Him, anxious to go wherever Jesus is going.
- Then from the side of road comes a desperate voice: "Jesus, son of David, have pity on me."
- The locals in the crowd know who it is: it's Bartimaeus, a blind beggar who, perhaps, was a bit of a nuisance to the denizens of Jericho. And so, they rebuke him and try to silence him in the presence of Jesus – dismissing him as unworthy of our Lord's attention.
- But Bartimaeus won't be silent! He's a man in need, and so he is insistent, calling out all the more: "Son of David, have pity on me!" – no doubt annoying those around him.
- Yet Bartimaeus is not unworthy to Jesus, even though he was most likely a rough and uncouth fellow – as beggars of every time and place tend to be. So, our Lord stops, calls Bartimaeus to Himself, and eventually heals him.
- As we think about this story and the type of man Bartimaeus was, we may be tempted to look down on him – just like the people of his day. We may be tempted to have that same type of condescending pity many people have for the beggars and street people that we see today.
- But in truth, Bartimaeus is really someone to emulate! Why? Because even though Bartimaeus was physically blind, he wasn't blind to his own weaknesses.

- More importantly, Bartimaeus saw the truth about Jesus, and he had faith in Him. And in this knowledge of himself and of our Lord, Bartimaeus understood how he should relate to Jesus. Specifically, Bartimaeus knew that he was in need of God's mercy.
- He knew that he was broken and sinful, and so he cried out for mercy. And he's persistent in his pleading because he was absolutely confident in Christ's power to heal.
- That confident faith that Bartimaeus has in Christ is what enables him to be saved, and Christ says as much. When asked by Christ what he wants, Bartimaeus doesn't miss a beat.
- He says: "Master, I want to see." And Jesus tells him: "Go your way; your faith has saved you." And Bartimaeus is miraculously healed.
- I love this Gospel story because it begs a couple of questions. Typically, in Gospel stories like this, there is mention of how faith is the key to a person's healing. So, like most healing miracles, this story first makes us question the strength of our own faith in God's mercy.
- Do we trust God? Do we believe in His power to heal whatever needs healing within us? Are you humble enough to allow God to heal you on His terms, and not your own?
- But even more than challenging our faith, this story challenges us to consider our own blindness, our own weaknesses.
- And this is why the virtue of humility is absolutely indispensable.
- For humility is a virtue that looks with two eyes: the first that enables us to recognize our own misery and nothingness, so that we understand what beggars we are before God.
- And the second eye that enables us to see the God's magnificence, so that we can realize how much we should love Him, place our hope in Him, have faith in Him, and submit to Him.
- Without true humility, my brothers and sisters, we can never see all that truly ails us. We can never know our sins as we should. And without humility, we can never see how much we absolutely need God, which, in turn, means we will fail to ask for His mercy as we should.
- As we all know, we are living now in troubled times, and so many of us are facing incredible difficulties. And as suffering of all types enters our lives, it can be so very easy to harden our hearts to others and to God.
- We see this being played out in the divisiveness that is fast becoming the defining characteristic of this era. More than ever, people are quick to make judgments, form opinions, and dig in, unwilling to discuss or debate with an open mind.
- Yet as we settle into our foxholes, we must be ever wary of the sin of pride that can so easily blind us. We must be wary to hardening our hearts toward God and others, such that we become dismissive of others or unwilling to submit to God with faith, hope, and charity.
- So, ask yourself today: What are you blind to? What needs healing within you? In what way to you need God's mercy? Where are you lacking in humility?
- But after you ask these questions, remind yourself that God's grace is stronger than any proud blindness. And He is constantly calling us to true union with Himself.
- And if we seek Him out and heed His voice, as did Charles de Foucault, God will strengthen us to serve Him alone. And if we have the courage and humility to beg for His mercy, as did Bartimaeus, God will make us more capable of seeing the truth about ourselves and Him.
- Brothers and sisters, in our world of strife and division, we need to humbly recognize our own weaknesses and sins more than ever; we need to recognize God's greatness and search Him out and serve Him more than ever.
- Like Bartimaeus, may God give each of us the humility and courage to ask for His mercy and healing, and like Bl. Charles de Foucault, may God give us the grace of conversion and the willingness to show mercy to others.