I tend to be very cautious about introducing magic spells into Christianity. What I mean when I say magic spells is a sort of formulaic approach to God – if I say X then God is required to do Y. Or if you prefer it in terms of Charlie Brown holiday special (which will be a theme today), if I have the sincerest pumpkin patch the Great Pumpkin has to show up. So, what I am about to say should not be construed as a spell that is guaranteed to get God to give you what you want. So, with that caveat out of the way here it is: if you know what you want then it is much easier for God to give it to you. And I say this because of what we read in today’s Gospel. Briefly told, the story is that Jesus is leaving Jericho and the blind beggar Bartimaeus (try saying that three times fast) yells out to him quite a bit. When he finally has a direct encounter with Jesus, Bartimaeus is asked what he wants and without hesitation he replies, “My teacher, let me see again.” And with that Jesus restores his sight.

Now I realize this might sound like a really obvious point -- that we need to know what we want but I am not really sure that it is. Let me see if I can explain what I mean. It is my experience that we don’t always know what we want because we are fickle creatures or if you want it in the words of the great 20th century philosopher Pete Townsend, “Don’t pretend that you know me because I don’t even know myself.” Now maybe all of you understand at all times and in all places how you feel and why you feel that way and that the things you wanted yesterday are the same things you want today. And if you are one of those people you can nod off for the next hour and forty-five minutes. But for the rest of us have you ever noticed how often the things we think we want are not what we really want and the things that we don’t necessarily want often end up being the things that we most enjoy. So often it is a blessing that God does not give me the things for which I ask at the moment I ask for them.

Here is an example. When I was deployed in Qatar, I worked with a rather nasty woman. One day when I mentioned to her that my son Auggie was on the autism spectrum she replied “That was my biggest fear with my children that one of them would be autistic.” Before we had Auggie, I would probably have agreed with her fear. I would have not checked the box that said autistic on the pre-order form, but now having known Auggie all these years I cannot imagine him being any other way. If you had asked me before he was born, I would have known what I wanted and what I did not want but I would have been wrong. So, what is it about us that makes us have a gap between our impulses and our ultimate satisfaction? Why are we all so unreliable in what we wish for and what ultimately finds us rest for our soul? And further how do we tease out the difference? How do we know ourselves well enough to only ask for what we need deep in our soul? In one of the conclusions of the prayers of the people we ask for God to give us “Those good things which we dare not or through our blindness cannot ask.” How do we get rid of the blindness which has us asking for what we don’t want and being unaware of what it is that we actually do want? Well, let’s take a few minutes and see if we can work through this question.

And as a model for going forward I want to continue my theme and look at the *Charlie Brown Christmas Special* when Lucy says “the mere fact that you realize you need help indicates that you are not too far gone.” We need to start there, that is at the point where we realize that we have a problem and that problem is that our instincts and impulses may not always be right. Maybe it is just me but I find there is often an inverse relationship between the things I regret most in my life and the opinion I had of them at the time. That is many of the things I regret doing in my life I considered to be pretty awesome at the time I was doing them or at least began to do them– like when I accepted the job as administrative dean at Nashotah House. In my case I think the main reason for accepting the position was the title – seminary dean sounded much more important than rector at least on the human score card. But God had called me to be rector not an accountant in a clerical collar and that was the problem. I wanted to look good to the wrong audience. When things go wrong it is often because we are asking for things that are not part of God’s will but are rather part of our human will. We ask for things that will impress on the wrong scorecard.

As you know we just got back from a vacation and as part of this vacation we were on a river cruise. In such circumstances you have to do what most introverts fear and that is to socialize with complete strangers. It can almost be like high school with people jockeying for social position. As a result, Amy and I learned a lot of stuff we were not really all that interested in – what class people used when they flew commercial, the square footage of a few people’s houses and how many countries individuals had visited. It all seemed a little sad. When we are eulogized at our funeral will any of those things tell of a life well lived – today we remember Bob who always flew Business Class. In John’s Gospel, Jesus makes a rather remarkable promise. He says, “If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.” But when we read it we cannot forget the “in my name” part. This is not a simple magical incantation but is rather a manner of filtering where what we ask is what is in accordance with God’s will. In today’s story you notice that Bartimaeus did not ask for a really awesome chariot or great seats at the colosseum but rather for his eyesight to be restored. In other words, he asked to be whole, to be what God had created him to be. That should be our goal as well. When we ask God for something are we asking for something that fits with God’s will. We are saying thy will be done and not my will be done. It is certainly not easy because we are incredibly good at conflating the two.

If we want a magical incantation here is something that might work and it comes from the prophet Micah. It says, “He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” Perhaps when we ask God for things we should filter them through these three criteria – is it just, is it kind and is it humble. Now I realize that filtering our requests through such criteria may make our wish list a lot shorter but that is okay, it is less to remember after all. Because if our goal is to be with God forevermore, we should start working on living in God’s will today.