

30th Sunday of Ordinary Time “What Bartimaeus Was Willing to Do”

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What is Bartimaeus willing to do to encounter Jesus? The blind beggar Bartimaeus discovers that the miracle worker Jesus of Nazareth is walking by him. He cries out, “Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me.” What happens next? The people around him start rebuking him, telling him to be quiet. How typical. But what is Bartimaeus willing to do to encounter Jesus?

You can imagine the scene. The crowd was honored that Jesus was visiting their town of Jericho. They didn’t want the cries of a poor blind beggar to spoil Jesus’ impression of them. When Bartimaeus cries out to Jesus, the crowd tells him to be quiet. We don’t want you to embarrass us. Bartimaeus isn’t discouraged. Despite the resistance, he cries out all the louder, “Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me!” Jesus hears Bartimaeus’ cries. Jesus says, “Call him.” And it is somewhat humorous to see how quickly the crowd changes their tune. Instead of telling Bartimaeus to be quiet, they quickly change their message, “Take courage, get up, Jesus is calling you.” The irony here is, Bartimaeus had already proven himself to be the most courageous person there.

Look at what Bartimaeus is willing to do. The Gospel says, Bartimaeus threw aside his cloak, sprang up and came to Jesus. Many exegetes think that the throwing aside of his cloak is symbolic of Bartimaeus’ desire to be completely transparent to the Lord. He wanted Jesus to see everything about him. Bartimaeus doesn’t want to hide anything from Jesus. This is an important point that we will get back to.

You may recall that Jesus asks Bartimaeus the same question he asks James and John in the Gospel reading last weekend, “What do you want me to do for you.” Notice that Bartimaeus is far more spiritually advanced than James and John at this point in that he isn’t interested in anything ambitious like sitting at Jesus’ right or left in the Kingdom of God. Bartimaeus’ request is far more profound and far more moving, “Master, I want to see.” Jesus responds, “Go, your faith has saved you.” Immediately, Bartimaeus receives his sight and follows Jesus on the way. On the one hand, the gift of sight is rightly understood as a miracle from God. On the other hand, Bartimaeus wasn’t completely passive in the process of healing, was he? Look at what he was willing to do. Jesus says that his faith had saved him.

I believe that there are two obvious ways that a homily on this Gospel reading can go. One way begins with a simple observation. There is a lot of poverty in King County and beyond. When our poor, our mentally ill, or our outcasts cry out for help, how often do they get a response from our society to be quiet? I mention this because Jesus demonstrates in the Gospel reading a preferential option for the poor while the good people of Jericho didn’t want to be inconvenienced by the tearful cries of a blind beggar. As Church, we must always feel challenged to care for the poor the best we can and to support those organizations that can best help alleviate poverty. With a patron such as Saint Vincent de Paul, as a parish we should take special notice.

Another way a homily on this Gospel reading can challenge us begins with the question, how are we like Bartimaeus? We very well may have physical or mental ailments that we may ask Jesus for healing like we do when we seek the sacrament of the anointing of the sick. On the other hand, we may feel like we have spiritual blindness rather than physical ailments that keeps us from growing in our relationships with God, family members, coworkers, etc. We can therefore also ask ourselves, what are the areas where we are spiritually blind, needing healing and new sight? Anyone who is going through serious grief knows what it means to ask Jesus for sight. Anyone who really struggles with addiction or family problems of any kind knows what it means to cry out to Jesus for help. This Gospel reading can invite us to consider those times when we have cried out in our prayer, “Jesus Son of David have pity on me.”

Of course, receiving spiritual healing from Jesus is not an automatic process in the Gospel. It wasn't enough for Bartimaeus to simply cry out for help, although crying out for help is a very good start. What can impede us here is pride, right? Sometimes our pride can get in the way of an encounter with Jesus. In addition to crying out for help, however, Bartimaeus needed to be persistent in his petition and not give up hope, even when the people around him or the society he lived in were actively discouraging him. Bartimaeus was persistent in his prayer to Jesus and did not give up hope. When we find ourselves crying out to Jesus about something going on in our life, the culture around us at times expects us to be quiet. The culture expects us to help ourselves or suffer silently. The culture can also give us really bad ideas that can only make our situation worse. Like Bartimaeus, we need to be persistent in our prayer, focus on Jesus and not lose hope.

Secondly, when Jesus called Bartimaeus, the Gospel says Bartimaeus threw his cloak aside, sprang up and came to Jesus. After we cry out to Jesus for spiritual healing or spiritual sight, when Jesus calls us, are we willing to throw aside our cloaks and allow ourselves to be completely transparent to Jesus? Our pride can keep us from being completely transparent to Jesus, or to anyone else for that matter. This can be problematic at times, right? For example, if you hide anything from your medical doctor that you might find embarrassing to articulate, what you don't tell your doctor can kill you. Similarly, if we want to receive spiritual healing from the Lord, when we are called into his presence, we must throw the cloak aside and allow Jesus to be Lord, Savior, and the Divine Physician of every aspect of our lives, especially in the areas we are not very proud about. Only by throwing the cloak aside can we allow the healing touch of our Lord into every area of our lives. For instance, Jesus gave us the sacrament of reconciliation as a way for us to throw aside the cloak, so to speak, and allow Jesus' reign into every corner of our lives.

Finally, after Bartimaeus received his sight, look at what he was willing to do next. He chose not to go back to his former way of life. Once Jesus answered his prayers, the Gospel says Bartimaeus followed Jesus on the way. Bartimaeus leaves his former life behind to embrace a new life of following Jesus. Similarly, when Jesus offers us spiritual or physical healing, when Jesus offers us grace and spiritual sight, with joy and with

grateful hearts we are called to move away from our former way of doing things and follow Jesus who is the way, the truth and the life.

My friends, what are the areas of spiritual blindness that we need to present to the Lord for healing? Can we hear the encouraging words from our Gospel reading, “Take courage, get up, Jesus is calling you”? Can we be completely transparent to the Lord, allowing his grace into every aspect of our lives, especially the areas we are not proud about? You see, whatever we are dealing with right now, whatever troubles we face, look at what Jesus is willing to do for us. Jesus will even go to the cross, indeed to hell and back to save us. That is what Jesus is willing to do for us! That is how much he loves us. How much do we love him? How much do we trust him? How far are we willing to walk with him? As we reflect on the crosses we carry and contemplate on the witness of Bartimaeus, perhaps the most haunting question really becomes, if we are sitting on the side of the road right now and Jesus is passing nearby, what are we willing to do to get his attention?