

What Do You Want Me To Do For You?

Jer. 31: 7-9; Ps. 126; Heb. 5: 1-6; Mk. 10: 46-52

In the Gospels for recent Sundays, Jesus has taught His disciples that, if they want to be great, they must become slaves, and the one who would be the greatest among them must be the servant of all. (Mk. 9:35, Mk. 10: 44) In the Gospel for this Sunday, Jesus gives a direct example of His teaching.

Bartimaeus was a blind beggar who parked himself at the side of the road hoping to get a few coins from passersby. Because he was blind, Bartimaeus could not earn a living so he found himself in the lowest stratum of Jewish society. One day, when he heard a commotion and learned that Jesus was coming, he boldly called out and, in spite of attempts to silence him, he continued to hail Jesus until Jesus told the people to call him over. And then He asked Bartimaeus: 'What do you want me to do for you?'

Jesus showed His disciples what it meant to humble oneself and be a servant by becoming one to a lowly man like Bartimaeus. Jesus behaved like a servant taking an order from the master who had summoned Him. Bartimaeus gave Jesus his order and Jesus fulfilled it.

On the surface, this story serves as an example of humility and service; Jesus, the Messiah, serving the beggar. Also, it is a story of faith. Bartimaeus, out of his great faith, made a direct request of Jesus with absolute confidence that it would be granted. But there is more to this episode, much more.

Bartimaeus can be said to represent every one of us. We may not be physically blind but we may experience spiritual blindness. We may be blinded by our pride, our ambition, our greed and be unable to see the world as God wants us to. Bartimaeus was sitting in one spot at the side of the road because of his blindness. Many of us are stuck in one spot in our journey through life because of our spiritual blindness. Often, we are bound up by our sinfulness and unable to move forward.

When we cry out to God like Bartimaeus, we do so in expectation of His mercy. Our confidence in God's mercy is reinforced by the Scripture readings. In the First Reading, Jeremiah prophesies that God, in His mercy, will bring everyone back from exile to Israel leaving no one behind; not the blind, nor the lame, not pregnant women, nor those in labour. God will care for all of us. In the Second Reading, we learn that Jesus 'is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward'. Regardless of our sinfulness, God's mercy and forgiveness will heal us because of our faith.

Pope Francis describes God's mercy as: the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us; the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness.

At Jesus' instruction, Bartimaeus was brought to Him by other people, by intermediaries. If we believe that we can be loved forever through the mercy of God, should we not serve our fellow pilgrims on this journey through life by acting as intermediaries so they can receive God's mercy? Should we not serve our brothers and sisters by helping them to walk across this bridge and receive healing? Our faith in God's mercy calls for nothing less.