

That I May See
Mark 10:46-52

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The dynamics of this Gospel passage are enormous. When we look at Bartimaeus, what can we imagine was going through his mind; what were his thoughts? "I am blind and I want to see; above all else I want to see!" On hearing it was Jesus who was passing by, he may have thought: "I have heard of Jesus and His miracles, I know He can help me to see. This may be my one and only opportunity to meet Him. I must do something to make Him see me. I can't let this opportunity slip by. I don't care what other people may say. I have to get Jesus to notice me." "Keep quiet you fool," they said, "remember your place. What use does Jesus have for you, an outcast?" What others said to him was of no importance. This was his only chance and he couldn't let it slip by. So he shouted all the louder: "Jesus, son of David have pity on me!" He shouted and shouted till Jesus heard him above the crowd. Then Jesus said, "Bring him to me."

"What can I do for you?" "Lord, that I may see." "It is your faith that gives you sight and makes you whole." The outcast became a believer and a follower. What would have happened to Bartimaeus had he kept silent as the crowd told him to be? There would have been no invitation to meet Jesus; no cure, only the continuation of the blind life of an outcast. Frustration and disappointment because his faith wasn't strong enough.

What would you do to be noticed if it were your last chance, your only chance to be cured? Would you stand up to the crowd and wave your arms to be noticed, or would you just submit to your blindness because others said to you, "be quiet!"

Most religious communities today advertise an openness, inviting all people to join their church. Too often that welcome is expected to conform to their accepted practice "keeping quiet."

Many seem to be frightened of the challenges of the different and the unusual. We seem to equate different with deviance and ignore the cry of the outside for all sorts of good and proper reasons. The word "welcome" seems to have conditions. We become disturbed and perturbed by those who shake up our perceptions. We enjoy things as they are, as long as we are the insiders. We seem to do almost anything to silence or ignore that which threatens to change or challenge us. This is what makes it so easy to identify with the crowd in this gospel. They found Bartimaeus' behavior shocking and disturbing. They disliked his outcry from the edge of the crowd to have mercy on him. The cry for mercy persistently comes from those sitting at the edge of the social order. It shakes up the insiders because it is a cry they prefer to ignore in order to be comfortable with their own perceptions.

The persistent cry of blind Bartimaeus stops Jesus in his tracks. Jesus questioned him. "What do you want of me?" "Lord, that I may see!" He was immediately delivered from his affliction because of his faith; for faith is also persistence. Bartimaeus was twice blessed; not only with sight for the body but also for sight in the soul. Having been healed, having experienced salvation, he became a model of discipleship and one of Jesus' followers.

It wasn't the shouting that was so important, it was the insistence and persistence of someone who is blind doing everything in his power to see again. Stevie Wonder once said: "Just because a man lacks the use of his eyes doesn't mean he lacks vision." I think it is also true that just because we do have sight, doesn't mean we do have vision. One of the most difficult types of blindness to get rid of is the blindness that stops us from seeing what another person is saying to us. Most people do not insist that we agree with them, but do insist we make an effort to see their point of view or at least be attentive. Jesus constantly taught His followers with parables so they could gradually see what He was saying. What did you personally see in this gospel passage? It is a message for not only the blind, but also the partially blind. Bartimaeus in a very real sense is about you and me; for we all have blind spots that need to be looked after.

Jesus stands ready and willing to help us recognize, face, and do something about our blind spots. At times we need to take a fresh approach to overcome our blind spots. The mindless recitation of our customary list of failings may not be good enough to break through a blind spot. We may need more. A more thoughtful and serious preparation to see past our excuses, to see past the faults of others, to see our own real faults. With the right attitude the sacrament of reconciliation is a source of curing blindness. It is not a magical process to set things right, but a pathway to overcome our blind spot. If we approach reconciliation as a magical experience we can be certain we will continue to live with our blind spot. If we approach Christ as a humble Bartimaeus, "Lord, I want to see!" We can be certain that we will not only receive forgiveness and insight, but also strength for the road ahead. The invitation to come into Jesus' presence was a sign to Bartimaeus that Jesus was willing to help. The invitation to reconciliation in the presence of a Priest, as representative of Christ and His Church, is also a sign to us of the saving power of Christ in the sacrament of reconciliation. This can truly be called the sacrament of enlightenment. All sinners are blinded by their actions, but now they can see through a renewed and refreshed soul.

Still we cannot pretend to have the power to change ourselves. It will be the power and grace of God which changes us when we cooperate. In all likelihood the change can be brought about by others who do not know they are affecting us. In the same way we become the occasion of grace for someone else, not because we made up our minds to do it, but because we yielded ourselves to God in order to see. We must see ourselves as God's mysterious creation, rather than as a self-defining and self-made existence.

The story of Bartimaeus is also a call to get back to the basics of our faith. A call that cannot be denied or held back in its' quest for healing. Reconciliation with God and with each other is to become a forgiving people, a welcoming people to the poor, the handicapped, the weak and defenseless, the unsure and the doubters. Sometimes it is just such as these who teach us to see and their cries to open our

hearts. Seeing is to be empathetic and concerned in our hearts. This is another form of seeing. The needs of all, not just the ones who see it our way and wonder what we mean when we say welcome. Bartimaeus cries out for all oppressed people, "Lord that we may truly see, so we can become your disciples." His response: "Come, follow me to the cross; for this is my pathway to cure your blindness."