

30th Sunday in Ordinary Time

We don't know why the sizable crowd told Bartimaeus to shut up. Apparently he was young enough that people knew his father by name, Timaeus. The son was blind, and you have to wonder how the father was handling that. Bartimaeus was a beggar, which society does not consider an honorable profession. He had heard about Jesus, and as Bartimaeus sat on the side of a road from Jericho, people told him Jesus of Nazareth was coming down that way. Bartimaeus used a loftier title for Jesus: Son of David, the greatest of the kings of Israel. Perhaps the crowd shushed him because they thought it was inappropriate to ask Jesus for money, or that Jesus had enough to do already, or that restoring sight was asking too much. Whatever the reason, they told Bartimaeus to be silent. He would not. He called out all the more, "Son of David, have pity on me."

Jesus could hear the voice of the blind man, so he surely could have heard Jesus' voice. But Jesus told the crowd, "Call him." The very people who just told Bartimaeus to pipe down now had to push him forward. Sometimes we too smother someone else's idea. But then someone we trust listens, hears something new, and completely changes how we see a situation.

Mark describes the details vividly. Bartimaeus threw aside his cloak, sprang up, and came to Jesus. Then they exchange what seems like the most obvious conversation in the bible: "What do you want me to do for you?" "I want to see." Elsewhere Jesus says that the Father knows what we need before we ask him. Saint Augustine explained, "our Lord and God does not want to know what we want (for he cannot fail to know it) but wants us rather to exercise our desire through our prayers, so that we may be able to receive what he is preparing to give us." Bartimaeus wanted to see with his eyes; he was already seeing with faith: He shouted louder when others told him to stop. He threw aside his cloak as if to cast off hopelessness. Then Jesus did something remarkable: He did nothing. He said no words of healing; he performed no special actions. He simply declared that faith had saved him. Jesus did nothing but analyze the situation, and Bartimaeus received his sight. Sometimes we think Jesus does nothing when he is responsible for something we did not see.

Jesus told Bartimaeus to go, but instead he followed Jesus "on the way," which was how early Christians described their discipleship: the way. Bartimaeus was already begging on a road, he walked up the road to approach Jesus. Now he was following Jesus on the same road. However, the road from Jericho leads to Jerusalem. Bartimaeus was ready to accept whatever this road would bring. When the crowd told him, "get up," they use a word that sounds like resurrection. The way leads to the cross; the cross leads to resurrection.

At times you and I become the people of this miracle. We are like the crowd, those who say we follow Jesus but stifle others by our attitudes and actions. Or we are Bartimaeus, asking Christ what he already knows we want so that we may be able to receive what he is preparing to give us. Or we are Timaeus, the father of a situation of which others do not approve. Or we think Jesus did nothing after we prayed because we failed to connect our blessings with his gift. But at all times we follow wherever he opens our eyes on the way.