

The world came to an end last Wednesday at 8:30 p.m. in Oakland, California. At that hour, West coast time, the Athletics had just lost their third game to the Los Angeles Dodgers. Before last week, most people thought Orel Hershiser was some kind of mouthwash. But at the end of the game Wednesday night, when the announcer said that Hershiser would pitch for the Dodgers on Thursday, the end of the world came to Oakland, California. This is significant because baseball is the sport of hope--you never know what the next pitch will bring. What other sport can attract fans so longsuffering that even the Chicago Cubs have a fan club? But this year the World Series was over the night before it ended; even baseball gave up hope.

This is sad, because we need examples of hope. It is so easy to despair. Sometimes our task is too large, and the benefits too small; the responsibilities too heavy, the joys too light. We start to wonder, is it worth trying anymore? "I've picked up after my husband for years and he still doesn't get the message." "I've talked to my kids about sex and drugs but they won't listen." "I visit my mother in the nursing home every week and she never responds." "I prayed to God that my dog wouldn't die, and she did." It's enough to make people wonder, "Does it do any good to pray? Does it do any good to do good?"

Those questions never occurred to blind Bartimaeus. He called out to Jesus. People told him to pipe down. He called the louder, "Son of David, have pity on me!" Blind and a beggar, Bartimaeus had hope. Nothing kept him down--not his sickness, not the crowd. Jesus hears the cry, stops, and demands, "Call him over." He doesn't go to the blind man, Bartimaeus goes to him. And Jesus asks, in a simple, beautiful way, the most stupid question in the Bible. He asks, "What do you want me to do for you?" We need never feel self-conscious about asking stupid questions again. It's obvious what Bartimaeus wants him to do, but Jesus wants to hear him say it. "Rabboni, I want to see." He receives his sight and follows Jesus.

Sometimes we despair too soon. Our responsibility can be overwhelming and we forget it's the Holy Spirit who gave it to us in the first place. Sometimes the solution is amazingly simple, but we're just too blind to see.

There was an elderly woman named Maria who grew poorer with each passing year. Sadly the more destitute the poor become the more impossible are the solutions they choose. Maria decided the only way to crawl out of her hole of poverty was to win the lottery. She went to church one Saturday and lit a candle in front of the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary. She knelt down and prayed, "O most holy virgin, please let me win the lottery." That week nothing happened, so she returned to church the following Saturday, lit another candle, and prayed, "O most holy Virgin, please let me win the lottery." Still nothing happened. A third week she returned to the church, lit a candle and prayed, "O most holy Virgin, please let me win the lottery." Then she had a vision. Mary appeared to her in robes of blue. Mary spoke to her and said, "Maria, help me out a little. Buy a lottery ticket."

Before you ever give up hope, meet Jesus halfway.