

Prayer changes us, so that we can change the world

A gospel reflection from Brian Wigger, Pastoral Associate

In our Gospel this weekend, we hear about Jesus healing this blind man named Bartimaeus. Bartimaeus is a really interesting and powerful character in the Gospel, and he is struggling with blindness. It's important that we're seeing this as a spiritual story. Spiritual blindness is always seen as a lack of faith. It means that Bartimaeus, and all of us when we're spiritually blind, don't see what we're meant to see. It's an inability to see God present and working in our lives. So he's blind.

But Bartimaeus is also a beggar, and this is probably a fairly overlooked point. You know, religion is different from any other institution on earth because it proposes a solution to an idea that within our power, we cannot solve. If you think about it, we always want to solve problems, and most of them we can. Car mechanics are great examples of this. Now I have no idea what to do when someone tells me that I have a broken catalytic converter or something, but in theory, with enough time, money, and know-how, there is no problem with a car that someone can't fix. But it's not the same with sin. Sin is a problem with the will and the mind becoming twisted and perverse, and more mind or will isn't going to fix it. No yoga class or aromatherapy is going to fix the problem of sin. Spiritually speaking, we're all beggars – we can't fix any of our spiritual problems and we all depend on God. So in this story, we're meant to identify with Bartimaeus, who like us, is a beggar.

Note that, when Bartimaeus is calling out to Jesus for help, he says, "Son of David, have pity on me!" In Greek, that's "eleison me, eleison me!" Actually, at the beginning of Mass, we say the same thing: "Kyrie eleison. Christe eleison. Kyrie eleison." Essentially, it could be translated, "Lord, have mercy/pity on me. Christ, have pity on me. Lord, have mercy/ pity on me," – just like the blind man! At the beginning of every Mass, we're putting our lives into context. We're putting ourselves ritually in the position of Bartimaeus in that we realize that we are beggars and we need help.

Actually, that's the virtue of Bartimaeus in the Gospel– he knows that he's a beggar, and that he can't fix his own problems, and so he calls out to Christ to save him