



JESUIT
INSTITUTE
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Homily

30th Sunday Ordinary Time – Year B

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The story of blind Bartimaeus can conjure up a lot of images for us. If we were to place ourselves in the position of Bartimaeus in our imaginations, what would it be like? Being blind, we would not be able to see anything around us. All we would have access to what we could hear was going on in the street. Presumably, from the story, we would be sitting at the entrance to the town of Jericho, on the side of the road. We could imagine having a bowl in front of us to collect money and the road being dusty – maybe it is a hot day as well. We might imagine that the street is busy – maybe there are a lot of people walking past us, on their way in or out of the town. There may be lots of noises in the background, such as people's footsteps and people talking to one another as they walk past. As a beggar, relying on the help of others for our survival, we would need to grab people's attention. So, perhaps we would raise our voice above the noises of the street, to draw attention to ourselves – to ask for help.

This is where it gets interesting. Like Bartimaeus, we are part of the forgotten or the unnoticed of the city of Jericho. The city doesn't notice people like us. So, why do we begin to scream out for Jesus when he comes close to us? If we are used to being walked past and ignored, why do we scream out for him? It gets more interesting. When we scream out, the people around us tell us to stop screaming – presumably because they think that the Master does not want to be bothered by the noise of a beggar on the side of the road. Maybe they think he has more important things to worry about? We must be used to this kind of treatment from people around us. So, why do we keep calling out to Jesus? What is it that makes us so insistent that Jesus listen to us?

The answer to that question comes at the end of the Gospel story today. Bartimaeus screams out for Jesus because he believes that Jesus has the power to heal him. He has the faith that if the Master can hear him, things will be better for him. He knows that Jesus can change his life if Jesus just hears him. So, he calls out in desperation. Jesus does hear him and asks for him to be brought to him. But Jesus' listening does not stop there. He asks Bartimaeus what he wants Jesus to do for him. Jesus doesn't assume that Bartimaeus wants to regain his sight. Jesus treats him in a different way to all the people who walk past him without seeing him. Jesus treats him like a human being and has a true encounter with Bartimaeus. When he finally gets his opportunity, he tells Jesus that he wants to see again. Then Jesus heals him, saying to him that his faith has made him well.

This story is a story about an encounter. Can we imagine how our interactions would be different if we truly encountered one another in our daily conversations? What if we spoke to people in our daily lives, having faith that whatever we said would be really heard and that such encounters could be transformative? Would we be more willing to share our lives – our thoughts, emotions, dreams and hopes, with those around us? Probably. But what would it take to be convinced that others would be receptive to us – and convinced that this encounter could change us? Like Bartimaeus, we are all probably used to people who pass us in our daily lives, who are not really interested in what we have to say or in who we are. In order to speak

out more deeply, we would need more faith in our fellow human beings around us. But how would that faith be nurtured?

Perhaps if we ourselves were to start listening more deeply in our conversations, we could encourage true encounters to happen. If the people who we spoke with got the sense that we were really listening, perhaps they would gain in confidence – and they might begin to share more of who they really were with us. This could be a start – a start of community building where encounter was the norm rather than the exception.

This kind of community building is precisely what Pope Francis is hoping for. On October the 10th, Pope Francis formally began the preparatory period for the next Synod, culminating in a Synodal Assembly in Rome in 2023. In his homily on that day, he expressed his hopes for the Synod – asking: in the Church,

“Are we good at listening? How good is the ‘hearing’ of our heart? Do we allow people to express themselves, to walk in faith even though they have had difficulties in life, and to be part of the life of the community without being hindered, rejected or judged?”

[\(HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS. St Peter’s Basilica. Sunday, 10 October 2021\)](#)

Considering the Gospel of today, this statement from Pope Francis gives us reason to pause. In our parish communities, are we really listening to one another? How many Bartimaeus’ do we ignore, walking past them on the way to other things? A similar question might be: how confident are we that people would listen if we truly told our stories, warts and all? Do we think that we would be judged or even rejected?

If, in answering these questions, we admit that there are a lot of Bartimaeus’ that we walk past and that we ourselves have no confidence that we would be listened to if we told our stories, then we know why Pope Francis wants us to have this Synod. Whatever definition we use, the Kingdom of God must surely be a community where people listen to one another and have the confidence to share their problems and challenges with one another. If this Synod can help us to build this Kingdom, surely this would be a life-changing event for the Church?!

This is our hope for the Synod: Let our Church community become a place where such transformative encounters like the one between Jesus and Bartimaeus are not exceptional – on the contrary, with God’s grace, let our Church community be known for such encounters – encounters where the Holy Spirit can move, and love and heal. May this Synod teach us to share our lives more deeply with one another and to listen more carefully to those around us – building up the Kingdom of God.
