

30th Sunday in Ordinary Time

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Dynamic Discipleship

You will have many defeats in life, but never defeat yourself. That is what the spectacular healing narrative of Bartimaeus teaches us today.

Bartimaeus, or Bar-Timaeus means “son of Timaeus.” The name “Timaeus” means “honoured” or “valued one”. Although Bartimaeus may have had a happy and honourable life, the blindness made his life miserable and left him in constant darkness. According to Jewish tradition, his fate of having physical blindness made him an outcast; sharply contrasted with the “inclusive” honour possibly given to his father. This is because the Jews believed that illness and disability are a punishment from God because the person had committed grave sins.

There is a saying: *“You have to stop and smell the roses.”* Bartimaeus believed, when he heard that Jesus was near and about to walk pass him, that it was time to smell again the fragrance of the lost happiness and Divinity in his life. And so he cried out to Jesus relentlessly, even though many people around him sternly rebuked and tried to keep him silent. Why was Bartimaeus told by the crowd to be quiet? In their opinion, stricken with blindness for his sins, he did not deserve to have Jesus listen to him.

Sometimes in our life we may fail and lose out, like Bartimaeus, and we may face situations where we receive stern warnings and rebuke “to keep us in our place”, preventing us from calling out to Jesus for help. This hindrance may come from both within ourselves, and externally.

It may be our busy schedule that does not allow us time to pray or remember God. It may come in the form of harsh criticism from others; disbelief in our own abilities and life; the evil friendships that we endure in our lives; our spiritual putrefaction and spiritual corruption; the immoral and evil practices in our life, including evil that is disguised as good and something to be celebrated such as Halloween, or immorality celebrated as acceptable by popular media.

Permit me to share a few thoughts on Halloween. “Halloween” was a Christian Catholic feast celebrated on the evening before the feast day of All Saints’ Day, or “All Halos’ Eve” (referring to the circle of light around a saint’s head, or “halo”) or ‘the Holy Evening’. It was during this evening before All Saints’ Day that people would go around their neighbourhood asking for prayers for their beloved dead relatives. In turn, they would receive gifts or sweets from their neighbours; and everything was celebrated in a spiritual manner. Over time, the focus shifted to include pagan and occult icons and evilness and madness intruded the once Holy feast; and the evening before All Saint’s Day became a celebration of darkness. On October 30, 2009, The Telegraph Newspaper (in the United Kingdom) reported that The Holy See warned that parents should not allow their children to dress up as ghosts and ghouls, calling Halloween a pagan celebration of terror, fear and death. In this light, dear parents, allow me to suggest that for Halloween, from now on, dress your children as Catholic Saints, and celebrate Halloween as it was previously celebrated in the Catholic faith and tradition; as All Halo’s Eve, or the evening before All Saints’ Day.

Like the people who shouted at Bartimaeus, negative influences, evil practices, and our sins shout at us to shut up and to keep ourselves at the corner of the road. Sometimes, our sins and negative influences cause us to be more marginalized and sidelined.

Let us reflect: do we fail to understand the opportunity offered by Jesus as He passes by in our own life, and to call upon Jesus for help in our miseries!

Bartimaeus had the courage to call out to Jesus, to encounter him, and then to follow Him. Not only were his eyes opened but his heart was, too. This physical transformation in his life affected a spiritual transformation resulting in Bartimaeus following in Jesus' way. In fact, it is believed that Bartimaeus was an active member of the early Markan Christian community, and all were well aware of his great story. **He had become a dynamic disciple of Jesus, the Son of David.**

Those who are determined can overcome anything
(Nelson Mandela)