

As we unfold today's scripture readings, let's begin by first looking at Bartimaeus, the blind man in today's gospel. We don't know very much about Bartimaeus except that he was blind. Being blind at the time of Jesus presented many challenges because people saw disabilities, physical ailments, and poverty as a punishment for sinful behavior. By the reaction of the crowd in today's gospel, we can assume that Bartimaeus was undervalued and overlooked by most. In other words, he was relegated to live life on the margins.

However, we can also surmise that Bartimaeus did not dismiss his own self-worth. He saw something in himself and in Jesus that many did not. When he called out to Jesus, with the words "Son of David have pity on me" he was told to be quiet. He was completely dismissed as irrelevant by others, but not by Jesus. Jesus saw his value and responded accordingly. Jesus has a way of cutting through the facades we put on, the masks we often wear, and can see the inner beauty, our true goodness that all too often is hidden from ourselves and from others.

Bartimaeus trusted that Jesus was different than the others and he was right. Unlike the rich man we encountered a few weeks ago, who left Jesus feeling sad because the cost of discipleship was too great, Bartimaeus simply asked for mercy. The response of Jesus was telling. Jesus told Bartimaeus that it was his faith that saved him, it was his faith that had restored his sight. Bartimaeus immediately left the past behind and followed Jesus on the path of discipleship.

Our first and second readings connect with our gospel in that they celebrate God's enduring love for us and all of creation. They tell us that we should rightly sing God's praise because we are precious in God's eyes and loved beyond measure. God's love and mercy is something we should celebrate and treasure. Taken together, our scriptures today challenge us to also look at the world around us with love and with compassion; with the eyes of faith and to celebrate the fact that we are loved, that we are children of God. We are challenged to reach out to those who live life on the margins, those who struggle, and to those who are dismissed by society. We are challenged to offer love, healing, and acceptance without question. There is not one single person ever created that is, was, or ever will be undeserving of love, undeserving of being treated with dignity, or who lacks value.

Putting this scriptural challenge into practice is not easy, it takes work on our part. Suspending personal judgment can be difficult at times, but that is our call, that is our faith. There is an important moral issue we face today in this country, and as the pastor of this parish, I am compelled to address it, as it is an assault on the faith we share. As a Church, as the people of God, we have an obligation to speak for the

voiceless, to stand on the side of justice, and to protect human dignity. Regardless of your political beliefs, we cannot, we must not, allow a group of people to be vilified for political expediency. We cannot silently ignore the plight of the suffering. As followers of Christ, we cannot remain silent in the face of injustice. The people fleeing violence and oppression in Central America are human beings. They are walking thousands of miles seeking a better life, seeking a change. They are walking with faith in their hearts that God will lead them forward. Like Bartimaeus, they are crying out for mercy, and we cannot ignore them, we cannot dismiss their value as human beings.

Their plight is more important than politics. This is not about politics, it is about right and wrong. As the people of God, followers of Christ, we are challenged to raise our voices and say no. Our faith challenges us to stand up and to speak out against closing our borders and vilifying groups of people who seek refuge and asylum. We must raise our voices against sending the military to prevent these people from asking for asylum. If we claim to be followers of Christ Jesus, we must ask ourselves what Jesus would do. We need to ask ourselves how Jesus would respond to people fleeing oppression, violence, and hardship.

Today's gospel reading demonstrates clearly what Jesus would do. Jesus ignored the crowd who tried to diminish the dignity and value of Bartimaeus and offered him healing, love and compassion. Jesus offered hope, and so too must we. We cannot stop with speaking out for those walking from Central America seeking a new life, a life free from violence and oppression, but we must also reach out to those who live on the margins of our society. Remember the words of Jesus: "Whatever you do for the least of my people, you do unto me."

As we move forward this week, let us carry the Gospel in our hearts and ask God to help us live our faith, to become the hands and feet of Christ for those who have been forgotten, rejected, abandoned, ridiculed, or unloved. Let us ask God to give us eyes to see the suffering of others and the courage to respond with love and compassion. Let us see each and every person as a reflection of God's love, the work of God's hands, as part of the beautiful tapestry of creation. Let us ask God to help us throw away our cloaks, our masks, our fears, so that we might follow Jesus more closely. Let us each ask Bartimaeus to take our hand as together we follow Jesus more closely.