

How shall we approach today's Gospel? What part of the passage should we focus on and see ourselves reflected in? Are we part of the crowd who is trying to shush Bartimaeus. "Be quiet. Nice people don't act like they have anything they need help with, especially in public. And they certainly don't ask so obviously, so directly, crying out in a crowd. It's too embarrassing." Or should we liken ourselves to Bartimaeus and ask what the areas of blindness in our lives are? Many preachers have taken these tacks. These are both fine approaches, but what about the bigger picture?

The story of Bartimaeus follows immediately after last week's passage in which the sons of Zebedee asked to sit at Jesus' right and left when he came into his Glory. In that story the disciples, the Apostles in particular, are warned against seeking position and authority in order to have power over others or for the vane glory they bring. These are worldly things and not of Christ. Upon receiving his sight, Bartimaeus asks for nothing more, but follows Jesus "on the way," a phrase that meant for the early church that he followed Jesus "*as a post-resurrection-style, totally committed, Christian disciple*." St. Mark is using the two stories in contrast to show how Bartimaeus "got" what Jesus was all about, and the sons of Zebedee, at least at this point in their journey with Jesus, did not.

Now we come down to the \$64 question, what does following Jesus as a "*as a post-resurrection-style, totally committed, Christian disciple*" really mean? To be fair, I can't give a complete answer in one homily, but I can point in the general direction. First, remember Jesus' response to the man who asked what he must do to have eternal life. Jesus told him to love God and love his neighbor by following the commandments. And if he felt he needed to do more, he should give generously of his possessions and "follow Jesus."

The next thing we need to look at if we want to imitate Bartimaeus in following Jesus "on the way" is Jesus' analogy of the lamp that is lit to give light to all in the house and not put under a basket. First, is there really a light, and if so is it set out or is it concealed? If there is no real light, no real faith, but only a pretense of faith, that's hypocrisy. This happens when we want to seem more Christian than we really are. It's used to fit in or to use the faith community for one's own purposes. Hypocrisy erodes a Christian community from within. One thing that some might call hypocrisy but which is not is when a person of weak faith acts like a better Christian than they feel in

the hope of gaining a greater faith. As long as they are honest about what they are doing and make no attempt at deceiving others, this is a very good way to build ones faith.

Back to Jesus' analogy, say a person has a strong faith that burns brightly but it's under the basket of fear because the person doesn't want their circle of friends, or colleagues who are not Christian to ridicule or kick them out of the social circle. They may fear that job advancement might come slower or not at all. They fear it may cause fights, rifts or hard feelings in their family. They may just fear being perceived by others as a nut case, Holy Roller. In a word, the basket which hides the light of faith is cowardice. Of course, the light can't shine, the Good News can't be spread as long as it is concealed under the basket of cowardice.

So, Bartimaeus, what is it you most suffer from and need the Lord to heal you of? Do you want that healing enough to ask even though we're told we're not supposed to admit weakness? Asking for help is embarrassing. But all you have to do is sincerely ask. Ask and you shall receive; seek and you shall find; knock and the door will be opened to you. This is what our loving God promises. Do not be afraid. Just ask.