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A blind beggar sees

Roger Karban Illustration by Mark Bartholomew | Oct. 27, 2012 Spiritual Reflections

Unless we understand the original context in which Mark placed today?s gospel pericope, we won?t appreciate the important theological message he tried to convey.

Mark has just concluded his last prediction-misunderstanding-clarification passage on dying with Jesus. He and his disciples are leaving Jericho, the last town before they reach Jerusalem. The next narrative describes his triumphant Palm Sunday entrance into the holy city. Mark has just one bit of unfinished business before he narrates Jesus? last days. His chance meeting with Bartimaeus will take care of that business.

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Refusing to be silenced by the crowd, the blind beggar continually cries out, ?Jesus, son of David, have pity on me!?

Jesus finally responds, ? ?Call him. So they called the blind man, saying to him, ?Take courage; get up, Jesus is calling you.? ?

Notice the word used three times in less than 20 words? Call. For Mark?s original readers, the word call is very significant. Each is convinced she or he has been called by the risen Jesus to imitate his death and resurrection. How Bartimaeus answers this call will be a big thing.

?He threw aside his cloak, sprang up and came to Jesus.?

The beggar responds to Jesus? call as we would expect a perfect disciple to respond. He immediately throws aside what is probably his only possession, his cloak, and jumps up and hurries to Jesus. Jesus isn?t someone we put on our schedule for a future, convenient meeting. Our whole life revolves around his calls.

Jesus? next words are very symbolic: ?What do you want me to do for you??Just last week when, after Jesus? third prediction of his passion, death and resurrection, James and John come up and demand, ?Teacher we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.? At that point -- the only other time in Mark?s Gospel --- Jesus asks, ?What do you want me to do for you?? Zebedee?s sons arrogantly ask for the glory seats, a request a true disciple would never make. But today, every reader is bending forward with cupped ears to hear how a real follower of Jesus responds to that question. Bartimaeus? answer is simple, ?Master, I want to see.? According to Mark, it?s the only prayer a true Christian should ever make.

Every Christian should read at least the first few chapters of Christopher Chabris and Daniel Simons? 2010 book *The Invisible Gorilla*. The two psychologists conducted an experiment. People are instructed to count the number of passes a basketball team makes. While they?re counting, a girl in a gorilla outfit appears, weaving her way among the players, at times even standing in front of them. When the playing stops, the participants are asked two questions: How many passes did you see? And did you see the gorilla? Though almost everyone nailed the number of passes, few noticed the gorilla. Chabris and Simons concluded that no one sees everything passing before their eyes. We only see what we?re expecting to see or what we?re looking for.

The historical Jesus of Nazareth was all about seeing. His ministry revolved around a conviction that God?s kingdom is close at hand, right before our eyes. God is working effectively in our everyday lives -- something most people never seem to notice. They presume God is securely ensconced in heaven, not active here on earth. That?s why Jesus demands a repentance of those who receive this good news. They must go through a metanoia, a complete change of their value system.

Notice what Jesus says to Bartimaeus. We?d logically expect him to command, ?Receive your sight!? or something similar. But instead, he simply tells him, ?Go your way; your faith has saved you.?

In a sense, Jesus is saying, ?I don?t have to give you your sight; your faith has already done that. Faith in me enables you to see what I see.?

Mark provides us with a glimpse of the perfect disciple. Bartimaeus, Mark tells us, ?followed him on the way.? That way leads to Jerusalem, to suffering, death and resurrection.

Whoever thought a blind beggar would actually show us what to pray for? It?s all a matter of noticing what?s before our very eyes.

[Roger Vermalen Karban is a priest of the Belleville, Ill., diocese and pastor of Our Lady of Good Counsel Parish in Renault, Ill.]

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