

JESUS STOPS AND ATTENDS TO OUR CRY

Dear sisters and brothers, as we gather for the Eucharist this morning, we can come with confidence because we see in the gospel how God responds to the cry of a person in need. And so, as we come to the Eucharist, we bring our own needs and the needs of the world, confident that our God is merciful and faithful, and that he will respond to our needs.

Let us begin the Eucharist by calling to mind our sins and asking the Lord to heal us in mind, body and spirit.



I asked that this painting be displayed during the reading of the gospel today. I have this painting in my office space in my room. It is placed just in front of my table, and so every time I look up, I see this beautiful picture, which is a reminder to ask the Lord to open my eyes to everything that is important around me. As we listen to this gospel of Jesus healing the blind beggar, let us also put ourselves in that position and ask that the Lord opens our eyes.

In today's gospel, we have this very powerful setting in which there is a simple, ordinary, blind beggar, sitting by the roadside. His name is Bartimaeus. Mark is the only one who mentions his name, and so this is not an anonymous person: he already becomes someone—a person—by the mention of his name. He is sitting by the roadside—very likely in Jerusalem, there must be crowds of people around—and he starts shouting, crying out. Jesus and his disciples were leaving Jericho and moving towards Jerusalem, and the gospel says Jesus stopped on hearing the cry of the blind beggar.

Jesus stopped. By his cry, the blind beggar had the power to interrupt Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. Jesus stops because he wants to attend to that cry. God is always merciful and faithful, and he attends to the cries of the people. In the Old Testament, in the Book of Exodus, chapter 3, verses 7 and following, we read that God said: I have seen the miserable state of my people in Egypt. I have heard their cry to be free of their slave-drivers. The cry of the sons of Israel has come to me, and I have witnessed the way in which the Egyptians oppress them. Then God selects a leader, Moses, to liberate the people who cried to him for help.

Dear sisters and brothers, God listens to the cry of people. Recently, a man told me that there had been a sad incident in the family. His son had gone to Dubai at the promise of employment. He was a chartered accountant and was promised a job with a good salary and accommodation. But when he went there, he was totally disappointed: he was cheated and given something that was not according to the agreement. So this man and his wife sat together and prayed, and in their prayer, they cried out to God; they shed tears. And God heard their prayers and helped their son in his difficult situation.

My dear sisters and brothers, maybe we could all ask ourselves: have we ever cried out to God – not just asked for something, but cried out to him? If we cry out to God, we can interrupt him and get his attention. Just like the blind beggar shouted out – in spite of the people around him telling him to be quiet, he shouted

and cried out all the louder. The gospel says that Jesus stopped. It was an interruption of two things. At that time, many of the rabbis taught their disciples while they walked on their journeys. Jesus too was probably teaching his disciples as they journeyed towards Jerusalem, but he hears the cry of the beggar. And this cry stopped both, Jesus' journey and his teaching. The cry had the capacity to stop Jesus and get his attention. When Jesus stopped his teaching, it also indicated to his disciples that his actions were more important than his words. If a person needs something, Jesus makes it a priority. Actions speak louder than words. And so, Jesus takes action to respond to Bartimaeus' need and asks him, 'What do you want me to do for you?' Jesus is, in a certain sense, at Bartimaeus' disposal. Jesus stopped and healed Bartimaeus and gave him his sight.

Dear sisters and brothers, there are moments in our lives when we may be broken, we need healing, we are dejected and sad, and the Lord says: Stop me, and I will listen to your prayer; I will respond to it and answer you. Our prayer, and especially our cries and our tears, have the capacity to interrupt God and call his attention. He not only stops and gives us his attention but also responds in action by helping us, healing us, giving us strength to carry on our lives.

I would like to end with a beautiful little story I came across. This is an incident in the life of Fanny Crosby, an American mission worker and composer of gospel music. She was a poet, lyricist and one of the most prolific hymnists in history, writing more than 8,000 hymns and gospel songs. One day, she was visiting a prison in Manhattan. As she walked through the cells, she heard the feeble cry of a prisoner, 'Good Lord! Don't pass by me!' This had an impact on her, and that evening when she went home, she wrote one of her best gospel songs:

Pass me not O gentle Saviour, hear my humble cry.
While on others thou art calling, do not pass me by.

God hears the cries of his people, and so with confidence we can cry out to him as we pray in the words Jesus taught us. Our Father...



Fr Cleophas Fernandes
Parish Priest, St. Pius X Church