 St Benedict South-West 

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| **Sunday 28 October, Mark 10:46-52:** |

*‘As Jesus left Jericho with his disciples and a large crowd, Bartimaeus (that is, the son of Timaeus), a blind beggar, was sitting at the side of the road. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout and to say, ‘Son of David, Jesus, have pity on me.’ And many of them scolded him and told him to keep quiet, but he only shouted all the louder, ‘Son of David, have pity on me.’ Jesus stopped and said, ‘Call him here.’ So they called the blind man. ‘Courage,’ they said ‘get up; he is calling you.’ So throwing off his cloak, he jumped up and went to Jesus. Then Jesus spoke, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ ‘Rabbuni,’ the blind man said to him ‘Master, let me see again.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Go; your faith has saved you.’ And immediately his sight returned and he followed him along the road.’*

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Perhaps the oddest line in this Sunday’s gospel, at least to our modern ears, is ‘and many of them scolded him and told him to keep quiet…’

It sounds odd to us, because we do not share the first century Jewish understanding, that those born with a disability were considered ritually unclean. The people who scolded Bartimaeus thought they were doing the right thing in keeping him away from Jesus.

But the Holy Spirit communicates timeless truths through the human authors of the Gospels, not just interesting, but now irrelevant, historical detail. What does this part of the story mean to us, here and now?

Do we hear scolding voices, discouraging us from approaching Jesus? If so, where do they come from? From others, or from ourselves?

Someone might tell themselves that they can never again receive the Eucharist, because the sins in their past are too great. They tell themselves that they are even beyond the forgiveness of God in the sacrament of confession. This is a desperately sad misunderstanding of our relationship with Jesus, and with His Church as His continuing body, but it does show how strong the internal voices can be.

Others listen to the voices of those around them, and allow themselves to be distracted from the ‘source and summit of the Christian life’ - the Eucharist, the very thing which they have attended Holy Mass to receive. Perhaps it is the music, or the style of the liturgy - too traditional, too liberal, too many guitars, not enough guitars - there is always something to have an opinion on.

We should ignore these voices. ‘Prefer absolutely nothing to the love of Christ’, says St Benedict in his Rule. Focus all of our heart and soul, mind and strength on the real presence of Christ in his Church, in *our* church, and the rest all falls away.

Bartimaeus knew deep down in his soul that only Jesus could save him, and he ignored the voices, and cried out to Him. Do we really cry out to Him? Do *I* ? And when we have received the Eucharist, do we truly realise what has just happened? In one way or another, there is always a clamour of voices trying to distract us from what we have received under the signs of bread and wine. That is why it is never enough to simply hear with our ears - we must ‘incline the ear of the heart’, pay full attention to what is going on, at every level of our being. Even in a busy Mass, try to find time to pray in a listening way, to develop an awareness of the invisible as well as the visible, as the Creed reminds us.

In the Gospels, it is the blind and the deaf who really understand the value of seeing and hearing, and they cry out to Jesus from the depths. But we all suffer from spiritual blindness and deafness - and recognising it is the first rung on the ladder of humility, that essential condition for falling in love with the One who would save us.

(With thanks to Metropolitan Anthony, whose book ‘Living Prayer’ inspired this.)

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