

Children

Object: A tin cup.

Lesson: And they came to Jericho; and as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great multitude, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside.

Good morning, boys and girls. How many of you have ever begged for something? (Let them answer.) What did you beg for? (Let them answer.) Whom did you beg? (Let them answer.) What would you do if you had to beg for the food that you ate everyday, or for a place to sleep at night? Can you imagine what it would be like to get up every morning and know that you were going to have to beg that day, just so that you could live until the next day? Can you imagine how it would be if you had to beg every day, just so you would have something to eat, wear, or a place to sleep? It sounds awful, doesn't it?

A long time ago there was a blind man by the name of Bartimaeus who was like a lot of other blind men. They could not work on the farms or anywhere, so they had to beg to live. (Show them the tin cup.) Everyday they would sit at a busy street corner or in front of a busy building like the temple and beg a couple of pennies from the people who came by. It was not a very good life, but it was the only way they had to live.

It was on a day like this that Jesus was coming with his disciples out of the city called Jericho. Bartimaeus, the blind beggar, was sitting by the road with his tin cup begging all of the people who came by. He could not believe how lucky he was to be there when Jesus was coming, and he yelled as loud as he could for Jesus to stop to see him. The people who were close by told him to be quiet and to stop making such a noise. They were embarrassed by the sound that this blind man was making. But Bartimaeus had heard about Jesus and all of the wonderful things that he did, and he wanted Jesus to heal him. He called louder than even before for Jesus to come near him. This time Jesus heard him and came looking for him. Now the people talked differently. They too wanted to see what Jesus would do with the blind man, and so they told him to stand up and begin walking toward Jesus. Bartimaeus did just that and when Jesus saw him, he asked him what he could do for him. Bartimaeus could hardly speak. There he was, standing in front of Jesus with his cup in his hand, trying to speak. Bartimaeus did not want some pennies. Bartimaeus wanted to see, and he asked Jesus to give him back his sight, so that he could work like the other men. Jesus looked at the cup and then at Bartimaeus and told him to open his eyes and walk home. Because Bartimaeus believed that Jesus could heal him, Jesus did heal him, and he was well for ever. Never again would Bartimaeus have to beg with his cup. He would never forget the day that Jesus gave him back his sight. Bartimaeus believed in Jesus forever and so did everyone else who watched what happened that day. Amen.

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I

So often people remark that life is not fair. But it is fair. Think of the laborers in the vineyard that got paid the same wage. The ones who worked in the sun thought they should get more pay. But they got what was fair. In terms of life being fair it doesn't mean that every element of our life has to be good but if we are good we get the fair wage which is heaven. So when you work for a living you agree to a certain payment. Some days are good. Some days are not so good. But whatever the day is like you get the fair wage.

Suffering. No one likes to suffer. And I'll tell you no one likes to preach on suffering. We seem to think that suffering is not fair and we should not have to suffer. But suffering is just part of our life and when we suffer we are compensated for it in the life to come.

Today's gospel talks about a blind man who suffered. But through his suffering he taught us how to deal with those days but we think life is not fair because we suffer.

He was a blind man but nowadays they have new devices to help blind see. They have phone apps so that blind people can be in contact with someone if they need to do something. A blind person goes on the app when they have trouble going someplace so someone will direct them step by step.

In Jesus' day, there were few options for people born blind. If your family or community didn't help you, then begging was your only option for survival.

Today's lesson is about a blind man named Bartimaeus. **The first thing we learn about Bartimaeus is that he was disadvantaged.** He was blind. He was a beggar.

These were primitive times. There were no recordings for the blind, no seeing-eye-dog program, no hope of a cornea transplant, no smartphone apps., no apparatus that connects directly to the brain to provide images. Unless a miracle occurred, blind Bartimaeus was destined to spend his life in rags begging by the side of the road. He was truly among the disadvantaged. In his suffering many of us would think that he has the right to complain that life is not fair.

It is amazing to anyone who studies history how many great people start out with the odds against them. An extremely short list would include: Stephen Hawking, a world-famous physicist, who was diagnosed with ALS/Lou Gehrig's disease at the age of 21. He has spent much of his adult life in a wheelchair, only able to communicate through a computer program. Yet Stephen Hawking is known world-wide for his great intellect. But there are many well-known people who have had to suffer with being disadvantaged.

Actor Tom Cruise, movie producer Steven Spielberg, and the founder of Apple, Steve Jobs, all had dyslexia. Actress Emma Watson, one of the stars of the *Harry Potter* movie series, singer Justin Timberlake, and Microsoft founder Bill Gates have ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). President Franklin Delano Roosevelt was paralyzed by polio. Actress Charlize Theron and Oprah Winfrey came from backgrounds of abuse. Surfing champion Bethany Hamilton lost her left arm in a shark attack at the age of thirteen. (3), (4)

You never know what kind of disadvantages the people around you are facing. You never know how hard someone had to work to achieve the life they have.

Bartimaeus was disadvantaged. Many great people have fallen into that category. Bartimaeus probably was not only disadvantaged but was also made to feel rejected. Even his name, Bartimaeus simply means “Son of Timaeus.” We don’t even know Bartimaeus’ given name. He was not even important enough for them to have called him by any name except “Son of Timaeus.”

Religious people were probably small comfort to his feelings of rejection. As you know from reading the New Testament, there were many people, in that time, who felt that a physical handicap was a punishment by God. In their ignorance and superstition, they felt that someone surely sinned if a child was born with a handicap.

You may recall that Heather Whitestone, Miss America 1995, was deaf. Her mother, Daphne, was told to send Heather to a local school for the deaf. At best, they said, Heather might get a third-grade education. But Daphne encouraged Heather to stay in public school and to never expect less from herself because of her deafness.

After Heather won the Miss America pageant, someone created a poster to honor her accomplishments. Under a picture of her winning the pageant was the caption, “They said she would only be able to get a third-grade education. Fortunately, she wasn’t listening!” (5) No one would blame her mother for sending her to a school for the blind. No one would blame Heather for giving up. It’s the time to fight or flight. For all those disadvantaged persons I mentioned, it was time to fight – to be determined.

Bartimaeus was disadvantaged. All of us are, to a certain extent. We all have our handicaps. They may not be physical; they may be emotional. They may be handicaps of attitude. Some people let their disadvantage define them. They are the flyers. Others the fighters let it drive them. Perhaps one of the most dangerous handicaps is that of living a privileged life, because we never develop the mental and emotional and spiritual toughness that is required for dealing with adverse life situations.

There is an old American saying, sort of a put-down, to refer to someone who has had an easy life, who didn’t have to work to get where they are. It goes as, “They were born with a silver spoon in their mouth.”

Some people’s greatest disadvantage is that they were born with a silver spoon in their mouth. Their privileges prevent them from developing the spiritual and mental toughness to face life’s challenges. We all are disadvantaged in our own way.

Bartimaeus was disadvantaged but look at something else; **Bartimaeus was determined.** Bartimaeus was sitting beside the road going away from Jericho. Word came to him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. Bartimaeus started crying out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.” He wasn’t crying out life is not fair. He wasn’t whining about his suffering. He was a determined fighter.

Now remember, in that day, Bartimaeus was a nobody. A blind beggar. Someone to be ignored or avoided or pitied. But Bartimaeus refused to let his disability define him. He was determined to reach for the only hope he had—the mercy of the Messiah.

Author Tim Hansel tells of the great honor he had of introducing his two sons to motivational speaker Bob Wieland. Bob Wieland lost both his legs to a land mine in Vietnam while trying to save a fellow soldier. As Bob would say about his recovery from his devastating wounds, “I lost my legs, but I didn’t lose my heart.”

Bob began a grueling weight-lifting program and eventually set four world records in power lifting. In 1982, Bob Wieland set a goal to walk across the United States of America—on his hands. It took him almost four years to complete the walk. His purpose was to raise money for programs for Vietnam veterans. When Tim Hansel’s sons asked him what motivated him to set such a tremendous goal, he replied, “To encourage those with legs to take the first step in faith to please God.” (7)

And that’s what Bartimaeus was doing that day: taking the first step in faith toward Jesus Christ.

Many of the people in the crowd started to rebuke him and tell him not to make a scene, but he cried out all the more, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.”

Jesus stopped and said to his disciples, “Call him.”

They called Bartimaeus saying, “Take heart. Arise, He is calling for you.”

Look what Bartimaeus did next. He threw off his mantle and sprang up and came to Jesus.

Jesus asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?”

The blind man said to him, “Master! Let me receive my sight!”

Jesus said, “Go your way. Your faith has made you well.”

Bartimaeus was disadvantaged but Bartimaeus was determined. He was not going to let people tell him to be quiet. When he saw the opportunity for healing, he came. He wasn’t like the rich young ruler who came to Jesus asking, “What must I do to be saved?” He went away sadly when he learned that he would have to choose between his wealth and Jesus. Bartimaeus wasn’t like the man beside the pool of Bethesda, who, when Jesus asked him if he really wanted to be healed, made excuses for his situation.

Bartimaeus wanted to see with his eyes, and he was willing to pay any price to achieve this goal. He was determined. What a difference determination makes in life. Thank God for the Bartimaeuses of this world who will not be denied by their circumstances. They are the people who when life gives them lemons. They make lemonade.

Bartimaeus was disadvantaged. He was determined. And finally he was disciplined. Disciplined is a verb we have made out of a noun. We talk about making disciples in the church. The shorthand version is to say that we “disciple” people. A disciple is a follower, someone who shows loyal allegiance to another. Bartimaeus cried out for mercy. Jesus was prepared to give

him so much more. Bartimaeus was discipled. Listen to the last few words: “Jesus said to him, ‘Go your way. Your faith has made you well.’ And immediately” we read, “[Bartimaeus] received his sight and followed [Jesus] on the way.”

Bartimaeus became a follower of Jesus Christ. How could he do anything else? All his life Bartimaeus had been blind, and finally this man Jesus had set him free of this tremendous disadvantage. His work would get him into heaven, a fair wage for all he suffered.

I believe something happened to Bartimaeus that day, don't you? I believe the scales not only fell away from his eyes; I believe they fell away from his heart. For not only did his healing represent a victory over a physical problem, but his healing also said to Bartimaeus, “You really matter. You're a person of worth. The incarnate God cares about you.”

I don't believe that this determined man was ever again the same. I doubt if he ever let anyone put him down again. I doubt if he ever gave in to discouragement. Why? Because he knew he mattered. His healing was proof of that.

I have a feeling that Bartimaeus knew from the day he met Jesus that he was a “Child of the King” and he never forgot it. Thank God for this blind man with no name sitting beside the road out of Jericho, who was disadvantaged but determined, and finally was discipled, who became a follower of Jesus Christ, the man by whose love and whose grace he was healed.

3. “16 Wildly Successful People Who Overcame Huge Obstacles to Get There” by Renee Jacques, September 25, 2013, HuffPost.com, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/successful-people-obstacles_n_3964459.

4. “Celebrities with Learning Disabilities,” Ranker.com, December 6, 2020, <https://www.ranker.com/list/celebrities-with-learning-disabilities/celebrity-lists>.

5. “Capturing a Nation's Heart,” - a profile of Miss America, Heather Whitestone, *Pursuit*, Vol. III, No. 4, by Denise George, p. 26.

6. “40 brilliant idioms that simply can't be translated literally” by Helene Batt and Kate Torgovnick May, Ted.com, January 20, 2015, <https://blog.ted.com/40-idioms-that-cant-be-translated-literally/comment-page-10/>.

II. Msgr. Joseph A. Pellegrino

In the light of the baseball season in the middle of the playoffs, I thought I'd begin with a little story that combines sports and one of the themes of today's Gospel.

There was an elderly lady named Miss Nancy Jones, who lived in a small Midwestern community. She had the notoriety of being the oldest resident of the town. She was well into her nineties. No one knew of a time that she wasn't in the town. But no one really knew her. She was very much a loner. She wouldn't let anyone know her. She didn't want to be bothered with people. She felt it was just too risky. You can get hurt when you deal with people, you know. She would do her shopping, and talk to as few people as possible. She rarely opened her door for anyone. Sometimes people left her a note inviting her to Thanksgiving Dinner, or a Church social or something, but she would just ignore the invitation. Well, one day someone noticed that her newspapers had piled up on her doorstep. He called the police to investigate, and, sadly, they found that poor old Miss Jones died.

Now the editor of the local newspaper wanted to print a little caption noting Miss Jones' death. After all, she had been the oldest person in town. However, the more he thought about it, the more he became aware that no one knew anything about her. While he was worrying about what he should write, the editor went down to the local Starbucks to have his morning coffee. There he came upon the owner of the tombstone establishment. The editor asked him what he was going to put on Miss Jones' tombstone. "I haven't a clue," the man said. "She was the oldest person in town. We should have more than just the dates of her life on the tombstone, but I don't know what to put. You're the journalist. You or your people at the paper should be able to come up with something. I'll put the epitaph you come up with for the paper on the tombstone."

The editor decided that he had spent enough time on this. So he determined that when he got back to his office he would assign the first reporter he came across the task of writing a few lines suitable for both the paper and the tombstone. Well, when he got to the office, the first person he saw was a young college student who was interning to be a sports writer. The editor, didn't care, he gave the intern the job.

Now I am told that if you go to that small community and find Miss Jones' place in the cemetery, you'll read the following on her tombstone:

"Here lies the bones of Nancy Jones,
For her life held no terrors.
She trusted no one,
She died all alone,
No hits, no runs, no errors."

It's a sad story. She would not take risks; so she died all alone.

Blind Bartimaeus took a risk. He heard that this Messiah, this Jesus, was approaching, so he took the risk of calling out to him. Other's tried to quiet Bartimaeus, but what he lacked in eyesight he made up for in lungs. He just called louder. According to the Gospel reading, Jesus heard Bartimaeus, and then told his disciples to bring him over to him. At first, Bartimaeus hesitated, but then he took a step of trust in the Lord. He threw off his cloak and went to Jesus. This throwing off his cloak might not seem significant to us, but it was an action that was full of meaning. Bartimaeus' cloak was his mat, his bed, his warmth, his security blanket, and his one possession. To let it go was to let go of everything he depended on and to trust in the Lord. Bartimaeus let go and let God. And Jesus rewarded his trust, his faith, with sight.

Bartimaeus wasn't just given eyesight. He saw the Work of God. Jesus told him to "Go your way; your faith has saved you," but Bartimaeus didn't go. Instead he followed the Lord.

We are called out of our blindness into the light of the Lord. But to do this, we have to trust in God rather than in ourselves.

Many of you took a leap of trust when you fell in love and committed yourselves to that special person who became your husband or wife. For your love to grow, you know that you cannot hold on to any security other than simple faith, not just in your spouse but, more importantly, in the Lord. You have to have faith that He will help you to love as He loves. That is why it is so important that husbands and wives pray for each other and with each other and pray that they might respond to their vocation to marriage by being good husbands and wives.

Certainly, the raising of children demands trusting in the Lord. In this computer age, we check the Internet for the answers to all questions. The only thing is that raising children is not a scientific process. Children have souls, and personalities, and their own unique reflections of God. The closest thing to a handbook on how to raise a child properly is called the Bible. All parents find times that they are overwhelmed. It is a tremendous task to raise a child. You are called to form Christian children, capable of reflecting their unique images of God; yet you have to do this in a society that deifies materialism. You have to trust God to help you raise your children. Continue to pray for your children every day. Continue to ask God to help you be a good Mom, a good Dad, and trust Him.

Priests and religious had to take a step of blind faith in the Lord when they decided to embrace the yearning within them to serve God in these special ways. Our whole lives become a matter of just trusting in God. Sometimes that trust involves accepting new assignments. Sometimes that trust is as simple as saying your daily prayers and knowing that God will help you write the homily that His people need to hear.

A few years ago, one of the priests of our Diocese passed away after a brief sickness, Fr. Edward Wal. He was only 64. Some of you knew him. The story of his life beautifully illustrates trusting in the Lord. Fr. Wal was born in Poland. After he became a priest, he heard about the poor people in the mountains of Peru who had fervent faith but very few priests. So he asked his Archbishop to allow him to go to Peru. The Archbishop was hesitant, but he agreed. Fr. Wal didn't even speak Spanish, but he taught himself the language. After a time in Lima, Peru, the Bishop there sent him to go high up into the Andes Mountains, about 12,000 to

16,000 feet, to be pastor of a parish that served 242 different native American communities. The villagers mainly spoke a derivative of the Inca language, so Fr. Wal had to learn that too. He spent many years with these people.

Then the troubles started. Communists tried to draw the people away from the faith and to join them in rebelling against the government. Two priests who opposed them were found dead, modern day martyrs. Fr. Wal was next on their list of priests they intended to kill. He had stood up against the communists and had endeared himself to his people. Most of the people were miners, but they had not been paid in nine months. This would have been a great argument for the communists, but Fr. Wal went to the city, found the owners of the minds, and convinced them to pay

the miners their back wages, which the poor people received just before Christmas. You can imagine their excitement. You can also see why the communists wanted him dead. Death threats were made. One of his catechists was murdered. Still, Fr. Wal refused to leave his parish. The Bishop in Lima felt obliged to contact Fr. Wal's Archbishop in Poland to let him know about the situation. The Archbishop responded by demanding that Fr. Wal leave Peru. Two priests were dispatched to inform him that out of obedience, he could not stay. Another priest would take his place. Against his will, but trusting in God, Fr. Wal left, and ended up in Florida. He was always upset that he had to leave, but he also knew he had to trust in God. He was not blind to the call of the Lord not just to go to Peru, but to leave Peru when called.

I want to conclude by telling you another story. There once was a man named Nicholas who lived on a lovely island in the Mediterranean Sea. He loved this island with such a deep intensity that when he grew old his greatest joy was just walking along the water, looking at the sea, the beaches, the rocks, and the white washed houses. When the time came for Nicholas' life to end, he asked his sons to carry him outside and lay him on the ground. As he was about to die, he reached down by his side and clutched some earth in his hands. Nicholas died a happy man.

Now, immediately Nicholas reached the gates of heaven. God appeared to him in the guise of an old man with a long flowing beard. "Nicholas," said God, "you were a good man on earth, come into the joys of heaven." As they were about to enter the gates, God saw that Nicholas had soil in his hands, so he said, "Nicholas, you must let that soil go." "Never," said Nicholas. So God departed, leaving Nicholas standing outside the pearly gates, clutching his dirt.

After hundreds of heaven years went by, God came to Nicholas again, this time in the guise of one of Nicholas' old friends. They talked about the good old days, and had a lot of laughs. Then God said, "All right, it's time to enter heaven, friend. Let's go." But Nichols said, "Not if I have to let go of the soil of my lovely island." And once more Nicholas was left standing outside the gates alone, holding firmly onto his precious dirt.

Hundreds of more heavenly years went by when God came to Nick again, this time in the guise of Nicholas' beautiful and favorite granddaughter. She stepped outside the pearly gates and called, "Grandpa, Grandpa, I love you so much and miss you so much, I wish you were with

us in heaven." At that, Nick's heart melted. He gave his granddaughter such a big hug that the soil of his island slipped through his fingers. Then he walked through the pearly gates with his granddaughter.

The first thing he saw was his beautiful island.

To enjoy the wonders of God's love for us, we have to trust in Him.

III Fr Desiano

It sounds ridiculous, that Jesus asks this blind man what he wants from Jesus. What did Jesus think the man would ask for? If we imagine losing any of our senses, I think we would fear losing our sight more than anything else. I know whenever I meet someone blind, I can't help from trying to imagine what their lives must be like. I think of them very often. I cannot imagine life without seeing.

But perhaps Jesus can imagine a life like that because why else would he ask this man what he wanted from Jesus. Jesus certainly felt the man's desperation because Bartimaeus just would not stop shouting for Jesus. It's as if they bring him to Jesus because they cannot figure out what else to do with him. Bartimaeus is going to let them know: he wants to see Jesus.

Did Bartimaeus have needs even greater than being blind? Was the source of his desperation something deeper yet? In the first reading we have Jeremiah's majestic vision; but it doesn't talk about any healing from blindness. Jeremiah says that the blind and the lame will be able to accompany everyone else, as if being part of the people being restored as a community was the most important gift anyone could have, a gift that would offset any impediment. The tears of any handicaps are part of the tears of all humankind.

These are the tears of Jesus, the High Priest, who was not afraid to take on our frailty and brokenness; no, his very priesthood is taking our greatest brokenness, our death, on himself and offering it as an act of obedient love to his Father. If we are all joined to Jesus by our tears and pain, then we are joined to the community of Jesus as well.

Look what happens to Bartimaeus after he regains sight. He immediately follows Jesus. That's probably why the Scriptures can record his name—he became a disciple of Jesus. He was able to walk alongside Jesus and be part of the community of disciples that Jesus was forming. He was able to be part of the great restoration that Jesus was bringing about, a restoration that Jeremiah could only hint about in his prophecy.

Every one of us has impediments. Many times they are not physical impediments but handicaps that go even deeper. Do we ever ask ourselves if we lack things even greater than the loss of sight, or hearing, or a limb? Do we ever wonder if our spiritual deprivations, most of them self-caused, exceed those grotesque physical deprivations that so easily frighten us? Maybe all our deprivations are only overcome by becoming part of the community that God is forming, a community based on shared love and compassion.

I had an opportunity once to ask a blind man what his dreams were like. I was helping him cross the street in New York. "I dream just like you," he said. "You see things?" I asked. "I hear and feel and smell . . . these are my senses, and this is what I dream. Just like you." Blind though he was, he did not see himself as apart or different. He saw what was most essential to see, that we are ultimately one.

That's what Jesus comes to help us see; and, with his Priestly love, he invites us to find our unity in the Kingdom he forms among us.