

102509 HAVE YOU EVER CALLED OUT LIKE THAT?

I worked in the archdiocesan central offices for six years from 1985 until 1991. During that time I would drive into the heart of Philadelphia every day. There was a cafeteria on the top floor of the office building but sometimes I would have to catch lunch on the fly like so many others. In those instances there was a particular street vendor that I would often visit to get a hot dog and a soft pretzel. I began to notice that there was a homeless man who camped out not far from this vendor's cart. One day I asked the vendor about the homeless man. His response was, "Oh, that's Henry. He's harmless. I let him do some cleaning up and policing around the cart. I give him a couple of bucks and he can get a bite to eat. He lets me hold his medication for schizophrenia and I make sure that he gets his medicine every day."

I remember thinking to myself that so many of the homeless are not only homeless they are nameless and faceless too. But not to this street vendor, not to this man who himself was out on the streets every day in every kind of weather too. To him, the homeless fellow not only had a name but he was someone who was willing to help, someone who could accept a helping hand, someone who would trust another enough to let him hold his meds for him. I got to thinking. What made that street vendor stop looking past this homeless man to the point where he would begin to see not a homeless person but just another human being? The street vendor's name was Frank. Do you think that Henry called out to Frank the way that Bartimaeus called out to Jesus? "Yo, Frank, over here. How about a little something to eat? I'm really hungry." Do you think that's what he did to get Frank's attention or do you think he just kept showing up every day? Do you think Henry just kept persisting until eventually he got noticed, until the breakthrough happened in Frank?

"Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me." Bartimaeus was the man who called out like that. We don't know the name of too many people from two thousand years ago but we know Bartimaeus' name and we know a little something about him too. We know that he persisted even though he was shushed. Have you ever been shushed? In a movie theatre? In church? In a hospital? In a library? At work? At the dinner table? Have you ever been told to "Keep quiet" like Bartimaeus was told? What made that homeless man persist? What made Bartimaeus persist? And what made Frank notice? And what made Jesus notice?

There is a simple message for us today from God's Word in the Scriptures. Is there an area of your life where you struggled for a long time

but have finally given up with a shrug, thinking, “Well, what’s the use? That’s just the way I am?” The message for you today is clear. Hang in there. Keep it up. Keep trying. Persevere. Don’t lose hope.

Or, on the other hand. Have you stopped noticing those who live on the fringes of life? Those who exist pretty much on the margins of society? Do you find that you have lost the capacity to hear their cry—silent or vocal? And when that cry is muted—either by you in your own mind or by others—do you rest back and begin to think that things are normal and okay then? For Jesus, everybody counted. Everybody. Even those whom others see as the throw-aways of life, or the outcasts, or the breakers of the law, or the fringe people? For Him everybody counts and that is what gives us hope.

Some simple lessons to be drawn from the readings today. Don’t shush other people; listen to them. Don’t stop trying; choose to persevere despite the obstacles. Don’t stop noticing or caring; pay attention to what is happening around you. The Scripture message comes through loud and clear today. God never gave up on the Israelites even when they were unfaithful to Him. God has made Jesus his own high priest who is acquainted with our infirmities but has also the power to do something about them.

And one final point. Sometimes blindness is not cured by healing one’s sight. Sometimes one’s blindness is cured, ironically, by hearing. Bartimaeus heard people talking about Jesus and telling Jesus’ story. I submit that Bartimaeus had already begun to see before Jesus healed him. Bartimaeus believed that the power was there and the compassion was there. What Bartimaeus “saw” was that Jesus would use that power on him. Bartimaeus believed that. Without seeing, he believed. And isn’t that precisely our situation here today?