

It takes courage to see what is going on around us.

30th Sunday in Ordinary Time

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Today's Gospel reading tells the famous story of "Blind Bartimaeus" which witnesses to one of the many times in the Gospels that an encounter with Jesus leads to greater vision. Read in a purely literal way, we can see Jesus giving sight to a physically blind man as a simple miracle story. However, the effect of reading all the Gospel accounts of blindness and vision leads us to believe that there is more going on here: blindness and vision can be moral conditions as well as biological facts.

In another story in Mark's Gospel (Mk. 8:24-26), the restoration of full sight comes in stages, from total blindness to partial vision to seeing people like "walking trees", and only then to seeing them clearly. This is interesting, as it does not make vision a simple either/or but proposes a staged ascent to clearer and clearer vision. In the account of Bartimaeus, we might get a sense that "courage" aided him in this ascent to clear vision. It is often the case that it takes a lot of courage even to see what's going on around us. The classic example is that of the countless office workers and bureaucrats in Germany during the Holocaust, who aided and abetted the genocide by ignoring the fact that the items, numbers and digits they were processing in the forms that were coming across their desks were actual human beings with names; people who were somebody's son or daughter enroute to their own execution. They didn't have the courage to see what was truly going on.

In the other direction, we also get hints that there can be causes other than, or in addition to, biological blindness that can keep us from seeing things clearly. An example is the presence of a "crowd" as is mentioned in the beginning of this story as well as in Luke's Gospel in the famous story of Zacchaeus who, it says, "couldn't see Jesus because of the crowd" (Lk. 19:3). Can crowds render us blind? They certainly can when we allow the "crowds" (things that lead us to become distracted from what is really happening) to obscure the truth that is right in front of us. It's hard to step out from a crowd especially when it creates confusion and distraction from choosing the right path. Our Gospel today offers an insight and a clear goal to look at things through the lens of Jesus and our faith and not through the eyes of a crowd lest we are blinded by what seems to be a "good thing" but can lead to lasting harm.

The NYS Catholic Bishops' appropriately titled statement ["Proposal 1: A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing"](#) as well as [Bishop Matano's Catholic Courier article](#) for the month of October, regarding the "Equal Rights Amendment" set to be voted on at the Nov. 5th ballot for New York State, helps us clear away the "crowd" that causes blindness, confusion and distraction to see the real danger that this ballot issue as a whole can clearly become for New Yorkers. There is a "crowd" of vague points that are being put forth that distract us with its wording, that if challenged, would be seen as discrimination. If we vote yes, there is little hope for going back because changes to the NYS Constitution would enshrine these challenging views into law. The best way to move forward is to become informed of the potential harm the "Proposal 1/Equal Rights Amendment" can bring as viewed in light of our faith, pray for guidance to choose what is right, and vote, not to ease your conscience, but WITH your Christian conscience.