

October 25, 2009      Theme: Mercy

Mark 10:46-52      Terry and Fred Quinn

I can't help it. I have to start this homily with a quotation from my former novice mistress, Mother Incarnata. She often said, "None so blind as those who won't see." Well, I am sure Mother is getting a kick out of this now, wherever she may be, but she was right—and right in line with today's gospel.

Today we witness Jesus "on the road again"—actually on the road leaving Jericho on the way to Jerusalem. He is petitioned by the blind man Bartimeaus for the ability to see. Bartimieus was somewhat "pushy" shouting at Jesus even though those around him told him to keep quiet. Jesus is impressed by the man's persistence and his faith that Jesus would show him mercy. Two phrases jump out at us; first, that the blind man Bartimeaus was then able to see and then that he followed Jesus. We have two important verbs here---SEE and FOLLOWED. Certainly Jesus showed mercy to the man in restoring his sight, but more than physical sight is given, because when Bartimeaus followed Jesus down the road, he took the path of discipleship wherein he too, will be asked to show mercy to others and live the Way of Jesus. But the path of discipleship often brings with it "those who can't or won't see" and need to have their eyes opened as the blind man's was. There are those in positions of power in today's Roman Church who have recently begun an investigation of the nuns in the United States. Rome is unhappy with so-called post-Vatican II nuns who have donned secular clothes and abandoned traditional community life.

So, the question arises, "Who is seeing need and expressing mercy: following Jesus along today's road?"

A recent article in the magazine *America* tells the tale of a Franciscan Sister from Washington D.C., Sr. Ilia Delio who entered religious life after receiving a degree in pharmacology. She explains that though she had a Ph.D. she had only a rudimentary understanding of theology and religious life. But having been inspired by the works of Thomas Merton, particularly *Seven Story Mountain*, she began attending daily Mass and rather than appreciating the changes of Vatican II, she longed for what she saw as the mystical ritual of the Latin mass and traditional religion. She therefore decided to join a religious order and sought an austere community where she felt that she could make a lifetime sacrifice for God. She entered a Carmelite cloister, wore a traditional habit (which by the way she says was important to her because it represented holiness and religious identity)-- and followed a set schedule of daily prayer, silence and praying the Rosary. (sounds like what Rome wants the American nuns to emulate today.) However, Fred will explain how Sr. Ilia's life changed and how her eyes were opened as she followed a different path with Jesus just as Bartimeaus did on the road to Jerusalem.

Fred---Sr. Ilia's idea of religious life began to collapse in the cloister. She lived with women that she says suffered from depression, came from alcoholic families or were widowed early in life. She also tells us that there was little personal sharing and that the God she had once felt drawn to began to melt into the

darkness. She asked for a leave and was sent to a Franciscan community where the sisters also wore a habit and had a daily schedule of prayer, but whose openness was liberating. She began further study at Fordham and lived with the Ursuline sisters in the Bronx where she had no place to work-- until an Ursuline sister-- Sister Jeanne-- offered her office, a computer and a cooked dinner. For the first time she saw God humbly present in jeans and a sweatshirt. Among the Ursulines and Franciscans who also worked among the poor, and through her study of theology, she began to reflect on the Incarnation and the 2 ways of religious life. She realized that Jesus, while practicing Jewish customs and rituals, lived a humble life and when called to public ministry did not separate himself from others by dress or occupation. She realized that Jesus, aware of the economic and societal struggles of the time in which he lived, reached out to the poor, the sick and the dying. She understood that Jesus proclaimed the reign of God in the here and now, died the death of a criminal and then became transformed, showing himself to the early Christian community as their resurrected brother, asking them to proclaim the message of mercy and love and the ongoing life in the Spirit. Sr. Ilia was also influenced by the writings of Teilhard de Chardin and notes that he said that there is nothing profane on the earth for those who know how to see.

I'd like to also tell a short personal story. Last Saturday we attended a celebration for one of Terry's convent classmates' family, including the 95 year old mother of this classmate. The classmate, Eleanor (who is of course a Dominican Sister) runs what they call a Peaceable School in Jersey City with Sr. Barbara (a

Sister of Charity). 40 years ago, the two communities would not have even worked together. Sr. Barbara is an old friend of mine, since she was stationed in Jersey City when I worked there as a parish priest. She has always inspired me, but I talk about her today, because like the sisters mentioned in Sr. Iliia's article, she is the essence of charity in her dealings with the children in the school as she trains them to face their conflicting worlds without conflict. Conflict resolution between the children is featured at the school. She also, along with another sister adopted a child many years ago, an Haitian/Egyptian whose drug addicted parents weren't able to care for her. The child was raised in the convent and is now married and a mother, which makes Barbara not just a mother, but a grandmother. Her path has not been the path she envisioned when she entered about 50 years ago, and it may not be what some would call the "traditional" path, but it is the path that Jesus took—it is the path of mercy.

We do not tell these stories to indicate that we need to go out and look for new ways to show mercy to others—but to be aware of the ways we CAN show mercy in our daily lives---to our families, to our friends, to those we may meet, to the earth in which we live. Keeping this in mind we end with the definition of mercy:

1. Compassionate treatment, especially of those under one's power; clemency.
2. A disposition to be kind and forgiving.
3. Alleviation of distress; relief.

May we all be blessed as we give and receive mercy and may our eyes always be open so that we CAN and WILL see and then follow.