

PASTORAL SERMON
The Fourteenth Sunday of Luke
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Today's Gospel lesson of the healing of blind Bartimaeus is a good example of what it means to earnestly, persistently, and eagerly seek God. Commenting on the healing of the blind beggar, St. John Chrysostom writes:

Therefore learn, my beloved, that though we {are very vile} may be an outcast, but yet approach God with earnestness, even by ourselves, we shall be able to bring about whatever we ask . . . Though God may delay the gift, though there may be many who seek to hold us back, let us not desist from asking. For in this way most of all we shall win God to our side. (Homily 66 on Matthew)

This is quite a radical statement for a Father of the Church. It almost gives you the impression that we can, in fact, influence God. Most of us tend to think that our Christian response to whatever situation we find ourselves in is to be passive, and more accepting of whatever we face. But God never said, or desires that we should be miserable, unhappy, especially to the degree that we end up becoming resentful, bitter, full of anger and malice. Other Church Fathers point out that although Bartimaeus was physically blind, the eyes of his soul were illumined by God's grace because he had believed what he had heard from others about Jesus. The saints also speak of blind Bartimaeus as an example of earnest and humble prayer. Every time we come to Christ in prayer, they say, we should come to Him as blind beggars and cry out to Him to receive new light day by day.

All too often, while we may know what we want for ourselves, we may not always know what is best for us. The Holy Apostle Paul spoke of this in his letter to the Corinthians when he said: *Everything is permissible for me but not everything is beneficial.* (I Corinthians 6:12). We make personal choices each and every day of our lives. We also teach our children the importance of making good choices, to have good judgment, and to be responsible for their decisions. However, as much as we try, some things are not easily learned except by experience and at times, making mistakes. Yet some things can in fact be avoided, especially when one practices good common sense.

With this in mind: petitioning God and asking Him to grant us our request may mean that we might need to be prepared to receive what we may not even know we are asking for. From time to time, for example, people ask me to pray that they learn patience. Well then, I must ask, are you prepared to grow in learning patience? Do you realize what being patient requires you to do? Or better yet, how does having patience help you to know God better, or draw nearer to Him? It's almost as though we expect God to do it all while we remain uninvolved with no responsibility to accept.

And so, petitioning and asking God to grant us our request may also mean that we may also need to be prepared to know what **we** must also do. Pray for peace, we say. However, praying for peace may also mean that we must be militarily strong. On the other hand, praying for peace may also mean, perhaps, being more aggressive in our commitment to negotiating.

When asking God for something or petitioning Him with a personal request it also helps to remember that we are called as God's children to respond to others as we expect God to hear and respond to us. This pattern was established by our Lord Himself when He taught us to pray: *Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us...* (Matthew 6:13)

Do we consider those who offend and sin against us when we call upon God's forgiveness? Do we ever perceive how we might act in a way that we become a stumbling block for someone, and yet expect God to keep us free from all temptation? Are we active in ways to help others who face perils and misfortune, as we expect God to defend and protect us from all evil.

Prayer

O Christ, our God, Who in all times and places are worshipped and glorified, both in heaven and on earth, long-suffering, generous in mercy and rich in compassion, Who loves the righteous and is merciful to the sinner, Who calls all to repentance through the promise of blessings to come: Receive, O Lord, at this very hour our prayers and direct our lives according to Your commandments. Sanctify our souls, purify our bodies, set our minds aright, cleanse our thoughts, and deliver us from affliction and distress. Surround us with Your holy angels, so that guided and guarded by them, we may attain to the oneness of the Faith and to the knowledge of Your glory, O Thou Who art blessed unto ages of ages. A-men. [a prayer of Compline]