

Exclusion

A partially deaf lad was given a note by his teacher to give to his mother, suggesting that she take him out of school, because he was too slow to learn. The mother's reaction was to set to it, and begin teaching him herself. The boy grew up, and Thomas Edison, for that was his name, left a wealth of inventions that leaves us all deeply in his debt.

Not unlike the teacher in the above story the people in today's gospel wanted to silence the blind man, Bartimaeus - all because he was making a nuisance of himself in calling out wildly to Jesus for help. At that time, blindness, or any incapacity, were considered to be due payment for the person's sins. But Jesus turned this way of thinking on its head. Even families tended to disown their own – being blind or disabled from birth didn't seem to stir their conscience. Hence, Bartimaeus was reduced to begging for a living.

The contemporaries of Jesus needed a radical overhaul in their way of thinking. In another incident in John's Gospel where a man was born blind the people asked Jesus: "Who sinned, this man or his parents for him to have been born blind". Much to their surprise Jesus was vehement that neither he nor his parents had sinned". He told them that it was their eyes which needed to be opened.

But does human nature ever change. In the news this week we saw what happened in a care home where vulnerable people were systematically abused and ill-treated over a long period.

Today we rarely see blind beggars sitting by the wayside but we may not be as tolerant as we should be towards those with a physical or mental disability. You remember a couple of years ago where this disabled woman and her daughter felt forced to take their lives because of persistent taunting by local hoodlums'. On the other hand the Para Olympics in the summer were a great success. People with disabilities took centre stage, even if only for a couple of weeks, and were acclaimed by everyone for what they had achieved. To the credit of people these days there is a growth in our understanding of people with disabilities.

Real love for a person must move beyond the safe and comfortable and reach people whom others may want to side-line as in the case of the Bartimaeus. And, just like in the time of Jesus, people often justify their

lack of love by putting the blame on the person for their own predicament. As Christians we need to put these pre-conceived ideas aside and see the face of Jesus in everyone especially in those who carry the cross of incapacity whether it be physical or mental or whatever.

Jesus could have gone along with the crowd in scolding the blind man for being an upstart. On the contrary He heard his cries, healed him, and gave him back his dignity as a human being. This was a lesson for his audience and also for us today.

May our blindness be taken away so that we can see Christ's image in the Bartimaeuses of the world in which we live. In so doing may the eyes of others be opened as well?

Questions

- 1. Is exclusion the answer to a very disruptive pupil in the classroom? Does exclusion bring them to their senses or does the answer lie with greater parental involvement? Discuss*
- 2. Are we pandering too much to the socially deprived at the expense of the majority of the population? Discuss*
- 3. Are we too quick to put the blame on people themselves for their apparently dysfunctional lives and use this as an excuse for not helping them? Discuss*
- 4. Bartimaeus wanted his life changed – hence he 'cried out' to Jesus for immediate help. Is it OK to warn people in advance not to 'go down a certain road' or should we keep our advice to ourselves and mind our own business? Discuss*