

30 B

Two youngsters in the pre-Easter baptismal classes were overheard exchanging notes on their progress. One announced proudly 'we're up to original sin' 'That's nothing' scoffed the other 'we're past redemption'.

Well, the people in today's gospel would have considered blindness as a due punishment for a person's sins and thereby past redemption. Remember the story of man born blind in John's gospel when the people asked Jesus 'who sinned, this man or his parents for him to have been born blind'. Jesus emphatically reassured them that 'neither he nor his parents sinned'. And even if they did, in God's eyes no one is beyond redemption.

The people today were in for a surprise when Jesus heard the cries of the blind man and called him over. You remember on another occasion Jesus called Zacchaeus down from the tree. He also was a man who felt unfairly targeted because he was a tax collector. I'm sure that's one of the reasons he had to hide up in the tree.

A change of stance towards anyone with a disability was long overdue among the contemporaries of Jesus. And the healing of the blind beggar today should have gone a long way to having their eyes opened in this regard. Even though Bartimaeus was blind physically, he had inner vision to believe that Jesus was the one who could save Him. It was the unbelieving crowd who needed their eyes opened. Have we got the faith and courage of Bartimaeus to believe that Jesus can turn around impossible situations for us too?

We too may need to face up to our own slanted way of thinking in this area. Our upbringing and background might have programmed us to think of people with a disability in a way which could easily be un-christlike.

Today we rarely see blind beggars sitting by the wayside but there may be other people in our society whom we pigeonhole. They may have somewhat weird patterns of behaviour or unsocial habits or come across as eccentric or odd or have some physical defect. I remember a couple of years ago how this poor woman and her daughter, both with a disability, felt forced to take their lives because of persistent taunting by a couple of unsavoury characters who lived near them'. And they say such crimes are on the increase.

Real love for a person will entice us out of our comfort zones and reach out to people whom others may want to shun as in the case of the blind beggar. And, just like in the time of Jesus, people often justify their coldness and lack of love by half-blaming the person for their own predicament. That gives them a good excuse for doing nothing.

Jesus could have gone along with the crowd in scolding the blind man for making a public nuisance of himself. On the contrary He heard his cries, restored his sight - and his dignity.

May our inner vision be more focussed so we can see the image of Jesus more clearly in the Bartimaeuses of this world? Faith, like his will save us too.