

### 30 B

*Two youngsters in the religious education classes were overheard exchanging notes on their progress. One announced proudly 'we're up to original sin' already in our syllabus. 'That's nothing' scoffed the other 'we're past redemption'.*

Well, the people in today's gospel would have considered Bartimaeus 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'. To their disappointment Jesus emphasised that 'neither he nor his parents had 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 above the noise and din of the crowd 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 just because he was a tax collector. I'm sure that was the main reason and well as lacking a few inches why he hid up the tree.

The majority bias at the time of Christ towards anyone with a debility would have taken some shifting. The healing of this blind beggar, however, should have gone a long way in 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 and would heal Him. It was the unbelieving crowd who needed their eyes opened.

Today we rarely see blind beggars sitting by the wayside but there are people in our society who have some physical or mental incapacity, like partial sight or deafness or memory loss or whatever. The son of Timaeus is everywhere.

Real love for a person will entice us out of our comfort zones and reach out to those whom others may want to shun as in the case of the blind beggar. And, just like in the time of Jesus, people often justified their failure to act by half-blaming the person for their predicament. Sometimes we justify our lack of compassion by saying for instance that 'a person's sins are catching up with them' or 'the quality of their life is zilch' and see that as a valid reason for not being a Good Samaritan to them. I'm glad the supporters of Baroness Meacher's Bill on assisted suicide didn't get it all their own way on Friday in the Lords. There was a great outcry against it especially among church people like yourselves. Unlike the blind man whose dignity Jesus restored, assisted suicide is a very undignified and unbecoming way to end one's life despite what its adherents keep going on about.

Jesus could have gone along with the crowd in scolding Bartimaeus for making a public nuisance of himself. On the contrary He heard his cries, restored his sight - and dignity. May He heal our blindness too and help us afford everyone the dignity they deserve.