

A quick heads-up: you might want to keep the readings we have been hearing from Hebrews in the back of your heads for the next month. It is possible that they might come up when we celebrate Christ the King at the end of November.

Today though, what might we learn from the encounter between Jesus, Bartimaeus and the crowd?

At first, the crowd rebuked Bartimaeus and told him to be silent. Then at Jesus' direction, the crowd called Bartimaeus to come to Jesus. Under their own initiative, the people in the crowd did at first what was presumably the wrong thing. They needed Jesus' instruction to do the correct thing. In our own lives, how often do we not know what to do in certain situations? We need to learn to turn to Jesus, first, before acting. That might not be something we naturally do but it is something we can learn to do and it can almost become like second nature. Think of it like the first time you drove a car or rode a bicycle. It might have been difficult and maybe even painful at first. With practice though, you learned to do it and now you don't even think about it, it just comes naturally. Learning to consult Jesus and do his will can also become second nature if we practice it enough. How do we practice turning to Jesus? Praying with the scriptures. Praying with the catechism. Doing spiritual reading. Learning about the lives of the saints so they can teach us how they did it. This is something each one of us can do on our own, but just like anything else that is worth doing, it takes hard work and practice. The more time we devote to practicing the spiritual life, the more and more natural it will become and we will instinctively know how Jesus wants us to respond.

If that sounds like hard work, yes, it IS hard work. That might discourage us. That discouragement is an echo of the voice of the crowd. We don't know why the people in the crowd rebuked Bartimaeus and told him to be quiet. It could have discouraged him and that often happens to us in many areas of our lives. I am going to share with you a little story kind of connected to this. I read this several months ago, it tugged at my heart then and then I just heard it again a couple days ago. It is a true story about a young man reflecting on growing up in New York City around 1910. He loved playing baseball but he kept getting bounced around between different kid teams, because as he said, he was "too fat." The boys in the teams teased him, called him "Fatty." He wrote, "They'd throw the ball wide just to get a good laugh when I started to waddle after it." He also wrote, "believe me it's no joke to be the little fat boy of the neighborhood." Years later, he was outside a major league stadium and he saw a kids' game in

progress with the boys laughing at another little boy puffing and panting as he tried to pick up the ball. The author wrote, “‘Poor little guy,’ I thought, ‘I know just how you feel.’ For it was the same sort of kidding I had to stand for when I was his age.”

The author goes on to say that the kidding he received made him shy about his own baseball dreams, he wrote that “even the dreams of the big leagues were buried in excess of layers of weight.” He said thought he would have given up on his dreams except that a childhood friend interceded and told a high school coach that the author was actually a good player. The coach gave him a chance and helped him to lose the weight. That is a true story. You know who wrote it? Henry Louis Gehrig Junior. Lou Gehrig. The Iron Horse. The Pride of the Yankees. One of the greatest first basemen of all time and widely regarded as one of the greatest baseball players of all time. After he was diagnosed with the neuromuscular illness ALS—now commonly referred to as Lou Gehrig’s disease—he retired from the Yankees in 1939 and in a speech on July 4, 1939 in Yankee Stadium he said that he considered himself to be the luckiest man on the face of the earth. That guy almost didn’t play baseball because for a while he listened to the voice of the crowd. But like Bartimaeus—through the help of a friend—Lou Gehrig was persistent, worked hard, and achieved his dreams, probably beyond his wildest expectations.

Let’s put ourselves into both of these stories in the form of an examination of conscience. When have we been the voice of the crowd, the first time they acted? Have we discouraged others in their dreams by rebuking them, making fun of them? How might we have been roadblocks to Jesus? When have we been the voice of the crowd after Jesus’ intercession? Do we seek opportunities to bring people to Jesus? Do we encourage people in their hopes and dreams to the extent that we can and is prudent? Lou Gehrig had a friend who saw past his weight, stood up for him, and helped set him on the path to achieving his dreams. Who has done that for us? Have we been that kind of friend for someone else?

Finally, in the midst of our sufferings and the bad breaks we have been given, are we able to be grateful to God for the blessings in our lives, thanking Jesus for saving us and walking beside us in our pain. Can we be like Bartimaeus and see past our afflictions and obstacles? Are we able to say, along with Lou Gehrig, today I consider myself the luckiest man—or woman—on the face of this earth?