



Imagine for a moment that you had the power to heal people. If you had that power maybe you would go right down to St. Joe Hospital, go right into the intensive care unit, find someone to heal – someone, you know, all hooked up to machines – and you just touch them and they are healed.

You wouldn't even have to say anything. The person receiving the healing wouldn't have to say anything. In fact, you could go right down the row of rooms, just heal everyone, one right after another. It would seem the humane thing to do if you had the power.

But notice this is not how Jesus operates. There is this blind man who is begging by the side of the road. He's begging, so we know he is poor. He probably doesn't look very good, not clean, shabby clothes. He calls out to Jesus, and you and I, if we had the power to heal, would probably go right up to him, touch his eyes and heal his blindness. It's pretty obvious what he needs.

But Jesus doesn't do that. He goes to him and asks him a question, "What do you want me to do for you?" Again, it's obvious what the man needs. He's blind, he needs to see. But Jesus doesn't just rush at him and force the healing on him. He treats him with incredible dignity. He asks him, "What do you want me to do for you?" He has great respect for the man's freedom. He lets the man tell him what he wants from him.

In this we see the great gentleness and tenderness of Jesus. Jesus, who is God all-powerful, who can do all things and knows all things, respectfully asks the blind man, "What can I do for you?"

And so Jesus treats us in the same way. God knows what you need and He can do all things, but He waits for us to come to Him. Yes, He does inspire us to come to Him. He is always moving first in our lives to draw us to Him. He doesn't just sort of sit back and let us flounder toward Him. He is always actively going after us, drawing us to Him, and yet He waits for us. He waits for us to ask Him for what we need. He waits for us to give Him permission to move in our lives, so respectful is He of our free will and dignity.

Is there anyone who treats us with such love and respect as Christ does?

So we can see, then, the importance of bringing Christ our needs. Even though He knows already everything we need, He still waits for us to ask Him for what we need. So, when Christ asks you in a moment of prayer, "What do you want me to do for you?" tell Him what you need with a confident heart knowing that He hears you.

I want to bring to mind for you another story of Christ's profound respect for our free will, this humble respect for our freedom.

Many of you know the story of St. Maximilian Kolbe. You will remember that he was the Polish priest in Auschwitz who offered his life to the Nazis in place of a father of children who was condemned to die. You may not know, though, another piece of the story of St. Maximilian. When he was a young teenager – of course, before He was a priest – the Blessed Mother appeared to him and offered him two roses, one white and one red, and she invited him to choose one of them. The white one represented purity, and the red one represented martyrdom. She invited him to choose one of these for his life.

You see how, even in giving his gracious gifts, God allowed St. Maximilian to choose. Incidentally, St. Maximilian chose both roses for his life.

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And so, with blind Bartimaeus, we cry out to the Lord, “Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me,” and we tell the Lord what we need and with St. Maximilian Kolbe, we lovingly accept everything that our gracious Lord offers us.

There's another little aspect to the Gospel story that I want to point out. After the blind man calls out to Jesus and Jesus summons him to come, it says that the blind man “threw aside his cloak, sprang up and came to Jesus.” Seems like maybe just a throw-away line describing the action of the scene, but in the scriptures there is no such thing as a throw-away line, and this one is full of meaning.

“Threw aside his cloak” – now this is all he has! This is a blind beggar who doesn't have a home to go back to. All he owns he has with him, but the prospect of healing from Jesus is so real for the man, he has such faith in Jesus that he leaves behind the only thing that he has to sleep in, the only thing he has to keep him warm at night. He has complete faith that Jesus is going to give him new life, so he throws aside his cloak and springs toward Jesus.

So again Jesus asks us too, “What do you want me to do for you?” We must spring toward Him completely in faith trusting fully that He will answer our prayer. Now we still must have the humility to understand that He may not answer our prayer precisely as we desire or with the timing that we would want. But he will always answer our prayer in the way that's best for us and others. And so we pray and spring toward Him in complete trust and with St. Maximilian Kolbe, we lovingly and trustingly accept everything that the Lord offers us.

Fr. Mark Gurtner at St. Anthony de Padua Church, South Bend
30th Sunday of Ordinary Time 2009