

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

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## The Behaviour Of A Crowd

There is a sharp contrast in today's Gospel between the crowd's response to a loudly-shouting supplicant, and the response of Jesus. There is something like a parade in progress when the scene begins: Jesus, his disciples, and a large crowd.

### Shame on you - be quiet!

The man is blind, and thus he belongs to us in our disability. It's natural for disability to silence people, and make them accept the isolation they already suffer. I detect in this thought a truth that characterizes our own day. When every housewife in the back-to-back street spent part of every day on laundry (wash Monday, starch Tuesday, etc) everyone had time for one another, and people were content to live close to one another, sharing a burdened life we look back on with dismay. Now that we all bung our drip-dries in the multifunction Zanussi and go off in the motorcar, we care nothing for one another and don't meet each other from one week to the next. We have learned independence, we have put our burdens aside; yet we no longer have time for a simple conversation; there's too much to be done for that. Are our lives enriched in this? Or enslaved? Another day for that; today, let us listen again to this shouting man. He isn't in anybody's procession. He's blind, and sitting by the road - going nowhere, and, it seems, a danger to shipping - not safe out. At least let him have the grace to shut up, and let people pass without his unseemly pollution of the sound-waves.

### "Son of David!"

In his time of peril and betrayal, King David had a man shouting after him in the street: a man who yelled his pain and failure in the form of curses. David's adjutants asked permission to silence him (by the radical method of removing his head from his shoulders) but David forbade them; he himself had begun to wonder where the favour of God had gone, and felt that if he bore these curses humbly, God might pity his wretchedness. Now another fallen man is shouting after the Son of David. His followers want to silence the man, but Jesus wants to hear him, and in this we can see that God wants to listen to our prayers: however much we make them out of darkened

hearts and sidelined lives, they will be listened-to with divine courtesy.

### Son of God

Today Jesus hears the wretchedness of a blind man. *Jesus stopped* (the procession) *and said: Call him here.* At once and with a single word he turns the crowd around: the whole atmosphere is changed. There's comedy in the transformation. *Courage, they said, get up: He is calling you.* His isolation is broken: the encounter for which he was crying out is ready to happen. *Then Jesus spoke: What do you want me to do for you?* Isn't this conspicuously different from last week's Gospel, where James and John asked him to *do what we want*, and he asked first, *what is it?* It is as if Jesus today makes a blind man free to ask what he will. The word "Rabbuni" is an endearment: *Dear Master*, he says, *let me see again* - because Jesus has already shown him a love that refused to pass him by, refused to leave him silenced at the roadside. He asks for something we take for granted: sight. *Immediately his sight returned, and he followed him along the road.* It can hardly be said that the procession re-formed; rather, the true evangelical "following" began. A man has been enlightened, a man who had been darkened and immobile rises to a new life.

### Now I Can See

What interests me in this story is the attitude of the crowd. They are still accompanying Jesus, as they were before, still "followers"; and yet we are not told that any in that crowd truly became a disciple. The blind man alone, in his very rejectedness, is a perfect candidate for discipleship. He has *the capacity to receive* which characterises only the poor. And what about the crowd? Something has happened which has changed a man from darkness to light: a human life has been opened to the day, and salvation has appeared to him. The crowd, who have never dreamed there was anything amiss with their eyes, do not appear to have noticed. *Fr Philip*