

## Homily Healing of blind Bartimaeus 10-25-15 (Lindsay)

For hundreds of years philosophers and theologians have wrestled with the problem of innate ideas. In other words, do we come into the world with any ideas already in our brains or are brains like wet clay and the world and experiences impress and form the ideas we find there later? A Sunday homily isn't the correct place to give a philosophy lecture, so I won't do that. But I mention this in passing because of our gospel readings today and Saturday morning.

Saturday morning's gospel concerns the Tower of Siloam. You have heard the reading before; 'Or those eighteen people who were killed when the tower at Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than everyone else who lived in Jerusalem? By no means!' We really don't know what Jesus is referring to here: apparently there was a tower that collapsed and killed eighteen people. As far as I know the only reference to this terrible accident is in the gospel of Luke. But that isn't the issue. The issue is this: how can we account for this random catastrophe in the scheme of things? Why did this happen to them? What was it about those particular eighteen people that they deserved such a death? Jesus tells us with no equivocation that they did nothing to deserve such a death. In the mind set of the time, most principally among the Jews raised under the Mosaic Law, when disaster struck it was due

to some sin. Someone did something wrong or this terrible thing wouldn't have happened. This type of thinking can produce two evils: 1) it casts God in the role of avenger, a sort of almighty Mafia boss that is constantly on the lookout for a way to avenge wrongs against Him. This (I think) is highly offensive to a God that loves His children. 2) The second evil that can come from this mindset is pride. A person would say to himself: Hey, I didn't get crushed when the tower fell. Those eighteen sinners did, but I wasn't one of them. I must be doing alright or I'd have been there and gotten crushed, too. Thank God I'm not a sinner like they were. Nothing could be further from the way Jesus thinks. He warns the people that they need to repent of their sins. That warning is for us, too.

Back to innate ideas. People with children or people that work with children will tell you that up until about age twelve a common obsession is the concept of fairness. this obsession starts very young. Children are highly tuned machines that insist on justice. Now, their idea of what constitutes justice may be irregular and not correct. But that idea is there nonetheless. I think it is a mark of original sin that oftentimes children will tolerate unfairness if and only if the unfairness is in their favor. But there is no tolerance for unfairness that goes against them. An exceptional child and one that is mature beyond their years is a child that won't tolerate unfairness that is in their favor.

Consider Blind Bartimaeus in today's gospel. All we know is that he is blind. He asks Jesus to heal him so he can see. From what I said before what do you conjecture that those people were thinking when they heard Bartimaeus calling to Jesus? Well, they rebuked him to be quiet. Why would they do that? Why weren't they more compassionate? They thought he was blind because he had sinned. Therefore, he deserved his blindness. Furthermore, to meddle with him would be to rebuke God Himself, because after all God had imposed blindness on him for some sin and who are we to interfere with God's judgment?

Jesus is having none of it. Bartimaeus is cured and Jesus tells him (and us) why. It was his faith that cured him. But like the poor people killed in the accident of the tower there isn't really a reason why. It is just the nature of the world that some people are going to be killed in accidents and some are going to be blind.

This brings us to a major point of contention between the Catholic soul and the evangelical Protestant soul. The Catholic is taught from birth that some things are a mystery. The Trinity, the Virgin Birth, the nature of evil, death and so forth. To think about these things is to enter the realm of ambiguity. To be mature in the faith is to make peace with ambiguity. We aren't going to have the answers this side of the grave. The evangelical

Protestant is very unhappy with any sort of ambiguity. They insist that the Bible has all the answers if you just read it correctly. And of course, their way of reading Sacred Scripture is the correct way.

Learn to love the mysteries of the Faith. We don't have all the answers to the great questions that bedevil humanity. If we did have all the answers, we wouldn't need faith in the first place. Understanding this, and embracing this is the first step on the road to an adult relationship with God.