

## **Arbiters of Grace**

30<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B)

October 24, 2021

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“And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent.”

These words in our Gospel today were said about Bartimaeus, the blind man sitting by the roadside calling out to Jesus as he passed by. Sadly, they were words of discouragement coming from the disciples and large crowd of people following Jesus out of Jericho. They did not want to deal with this man and did not want him bothering Jesus. It was only because of his perseverance by calling out all the more ‘Son of David, have pity on me’ that Bartimaeus got Jesus’ attention. Eventually, some members of the crowd around Jesus did help Bartimaeus encounter the Lord. Nonetheless, their first response was to be an obstacle to Jesus.

As seen in this story, those around Jesus can be one of the greatest obstacles to him. That is because they, or even better, we, want Jesus just for ourselves. Since we are close to him, we think he belongs to us and we make ourselves the judges of who can and can’t get near him. By the end of the Gospel story, in spite of the crowd’s discouragement, Jesus called out Bartimaeus, recognized his faith, healed him, and welcomed him into his company on the way.

In his document *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis challenges all of us who are close to Jesus to consider our motivations. He writes, “frequently, we act as arbiters of grace rather than its facilitators. But the church is not a tollhouse; it is the house of the Father, where there

is a place for everyone, with all their problems.” (47) While most Christians start out with the sincere intention of being a facilitator of grace in following Jesus, overtime, we can become too comfortable and controlling of him. As self-appointed arbiters, we eventually make ourselves the final authority of who is welcome. As the pope reminds us, however, there should be a place for everyone.

Being an arbiter of grace who does not make a place for everyone can take many forms in our Church today: believing ourselves holier than others, so looking down on others as unworthy; prioritizing our experience of God as the only valid one, so dismissing someone else’s experiences of God; claiming ownership over a church because we’ve been here the longest, so dismissing the newer members; thinking there is a limited amount of grace, so rationing it out as we see fit; wanting influence and power in the community, so never opening leadership positions up to someone else. Whenever we adopt these sorts of attitudes, no matter how close we are to Jesus, we are obstacles to grace.

*The closer we are to Jesus, the more cautious we must be about not being an obstacle to other people getting close to him.*

Are we arbiters or facilitators of grace?

As we continue with this mass, let us pray that we may not be arbiters of grace who treat the church like a tollhouse rebuking others and telling them to be silent whenever they call out to Jesus. Instead, let us be facilitators of grace who know that the church is our Father’s house and can say to others, with all their problems, ‘take courage, get up, Jesus is calling you.’