

As Peter and John were heading to the temple area, a crippled man begs for some alms. This brings to mind two different teachings:

- Jesus told us “The poor you will always have with you; but you will not always have me” (Mt 26:11). In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus had been approached by a woman who showed him homage and poured a costly perfumed oil over his feet. Jesus praises her for this kindness while others object to the lavish use of an expensive oil.
- In the Book of Deuteronomy we are taught, “The land will never lack for needy persons; that is why I command you: “Open your hand freely to your poor and to your needy kin in your land” (15:11). God wants us to be generous when we help others. He in turn will bless us in all of our undertakings (Dt 15:10).

Peter and John look intently at the man, perhaps more intently than the man himself had looked at the two apostles. With many people coming and going, he probably asked a thousand times a day for people to help. Peter and John want to help and the way that they do so is to acknowledge the other person and give him their full attention. “Peter looked intently at him, as did John, and said, ‘Look at us’” (Acts 3:4).

When I did ministry to the homeless in inner city Portland, a saintly mentor pointed out to me that in cities people often avert their gaze from beggars and the homeless. In doing so, they treat the people as if they don’t exist. And so, I began to observe and noticed that many did look the other way. They treated the poor in a way that often left them feeling more marginalized. The saintly mentor encouraged us to look and to engage. I certainly felt much more empowered and human as I did so. I acknowledged the existence of others and greeted them with a smile. Meanwhile, some averted their gaze from me. I was much more likely to get a smile in return from a homeless person.

We often ask for things that we want, but not always for that which we truly need. The beggar does not receive what he asked for, but rather what he needed. Peter told him, “I have neither silver nor gold, but what I do have I give you: in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean, [rise and] walk” (Acts 3:6). God wants us to be generous when we help others. Peter is blessed by God who helps the man who had been crippled since birth to rise and walk.

The beggar is filled with joy. His withered body has grown strong, and he is thankful to God. He shows his gratitude by entering the temple. “He leaped up, stood, and walked around, and went into the temple with them, walking and jumping and praising God” (Acts 3:8).

Miracles often point us to the greatest of all miracles, the resurrection. When we are beggars at death, we will meet the Son of Man in all his glory, and he will separate the sheep from the goats. “Then the king will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me’” (Mt 25:34-35).

When we do good for others, we may not always notice the blessing from God right away. Peter and John are arrested and held over night to face the leaders of the people and the elders (Acts 4:10). Mother Teresa reminds us, “If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives. Be kind anyway.”