

As We Pray For The Tree Of Life Synagogue In Pittsburgh

“Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me.” The words of the blind beggar sitting on the roadside as Jesus walks by in today’s Gospel. I wonder if the other bystanders tried to quiet his pleas because they found him too loud or perhaps embarrassing. Of course that also makes me think of the tendency we often see in ourselves to silence the people who say things we don’t want to hear or make invisible the people we don’t want to see. At the same time we also recognize ourselves in Bartimaeus. The beggar is us who cries out for attention and healing. The healing of those darker parts of our own inner life, and we all have them.

And then Jesus comes along who wants to hear every one of the voices shouting at him, including Bartimaeus. He dismisses no one. Jesus does not make assumptions about what Bartimaeus needs or wants. He simply asks: “What do you want me to do for you?” You tell me what you need. What is your deepest desire right now? And I wonder what would you or I ask for right now?

If Jesus had asked me on Friday what I wanted him to do for me, my answer would be very different from today. Today is the day after the gruesome attack on families celebrating the life of a newborn at a synagogue in Pittsburgh, PA. Today, with the rest of our nation, we remember the 11 worshippers who were killed as well as the 6 other persons who were injured.. Our hearts and prayers go out to the members of the Tree of Life Congregations in Pittsburg and to all the grieving families of the Pittsburgh Community.

There are indeed many forms of blindness. The blindness of Bartimaeus in today’s Gospel is only one of them. There is also the blindness of hatred, the hatred of others because they are different, because they hold points of view that conflict with our own, because they were born into a different culture, ethnic or racial group, because they belong to a different political party, or because they practice a different religion.

All forms of hatred are the work of evil forces in our world. Anti-semitism is one of those terrible and terrifying forms of hatred that reared its ugly head in Pittsburgh yesterday.

We recognize all forms of hatred, including anti-semitism, for what they are – a refusal to believe that we are all without exception created in God’s own image and likeness. To intentionally destroy another human life is to deny that truth. Furthermore hatred is a refusal to believe Jesus Christ himself when he tells us so clearly and plainly to love one another as he has loved us.

Today, we stand along the side of the road and we cry out to the Lord, “Jesus, Son of David, have pity on us!” And he asks us “What do you want me to do for you?”

And we answer: “ Help us, Lord, to drive all forms of hatred out of our world, and send your Holy Spirit to help the Jewish Community of Pittsburgh to replant the Tree of Life in their midst. May your Spirit lead them out of the darkness of yesterday’s tragedy to strengthen their faith and restore their hope.

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