

18th Sunday of Ordinary Time – Cycle A (July 31, 2011)

A man approached a poor blind beggar sitting on a busy street corner, who had a sign that read "I am blind, please help." In front of the blind man was a baseball cap turned upside down with only a few coins in it. The man asked the beggar if he could make the sign better so more people would give, which he did. At the end of the day, the man who had changed the sign went back to where the beggar was stationed and saw that the baseball cap was overflowing; someone gave the man a new container to hold the huge increase in donations. When the man spoke, the blind man recognized his voice and asked him, "What did you write on the sign? As soon as you left, people kept giving." He replied, "I just wrote: *This beautiful day that you can see and enjoy, I wish I could do the same.*" This message got people to respond.

The first sign the blind man had was a simple fact stating his blindness; the second allowed the message to reflect on those who read it: you have the beautiful gift of sight. The people, out of gratitude and compassion — the two realities that enlarge the human heart and change the world — came out of themselves and their world and walked in the blind beggar's shoes, if only for a moment.

When we focus on the negative, on what we don't have...on our blindness, little is changed. But when we dwell on what we have...the gifts that have been given to us, even one so powerful and taken for granted as the gift of sight, our worlds become life-giving and meaningful. Deep down we want to know that our lives are meaningful and have purpose.

The disciples saw a need: it was late and the people needed to go so that could get something to eat. They wanted Jesus to send the thousands of people away. Jesus would have nothing of that because he wanted the disciples to realize that the problem could be addressed by them...they had a reality deep in their hearts waiting to explode. United with Jesus, they could feed the people. They simply needed to trust.

Jesus commanded that they sit on the grass in groups, evoking a powerful image from Psalm 23: "The Lord is my Shepherd; in green pastures he gives me repose; beside restful waters he leads me." Jesus was the shepherd caring for his people because he was moved with compassion. He compelled the disciples to trust that in his spirit they could make the few — five loaves and two fishes — feed thousands of people; five plus two equals seven...easy math; seven is the number of completion.

Jesus blessed, broke and gave the food to the disciples who in turn fed the people. In Christ, our attitude changes; we become grateful and focus on what is possible, not on what can't be accomplished. The beggar's hat overflowed with donations when the people stopped for a brief moment and looked "within" so they were able to be an instrument of growth and change. Can you imagine how the beggar felt about humanity?

Just when we are at wits' end, when we think there is nothing left to do to make our lives better, or different, or more joyful, something can ignite within. Hope becomes multiplied...trust becomes multiplied...and we free ourselves to recognize a new path or a new direction. When we consistently live our lives by dwelling on what is missing, the negative, we become immobilized in a world of "nothing can change." The blind beggar teaches us to "open our eyes" to the Love of Christ which expands the heart, opening us to new possibilities.