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General audience: indifference and hostility blind us and prevent us from recognising Jesus in others

Vatican City, 15 June 2016 – The miracle of the healing of the blind man of Jericho, who was begging by the roadside and rebuked by the crowd following Jesus, was the subject of the Holy Father's catechesis during today's general audience in St. Peter's Square, attended by more than 25,000 people. To explain the profound meaning of this sign, which also concerns us, the Pope recalled that in those days a blind person could live only by means of charity, and his figure represents the many people who today too are marginalised as a result of a disability, physical or of another type. "He is separate from the crowd, and stays seated as the people pass by, busy and absorbed in their thoughts, and the street, that could be a place of encounter, is instead for him the place of solitude."

However, the scene of this solitude is the beautiful city of Jericho, the city where the people of Israel arrived after their long exodus from Egypt, and which symbolises the door leading to the promised land. It was there that Moses urged his people not to harden their heart or shut their hand against their poor brother, as "there will never cease to be poor in the land". Therefore, the contrast between this recommendation of the Law of God and the situation described in the Gospel is even more evident: while the blind man cries out, invoking Jesus, the people admonish him and try to stop him speaking, as if he had no right to be heard. "They show no compassion to him; on the contrary, they are irritated by his cries. How many times we too, when we see people on the street – people in need, sick, people with nothing to eat – we are irritated. How often we are troubled when faced with migrants and refugees. It is a temptation we all have; I do too. For this reason the Word of God warns us that indifference and hostility make us blind and deaf, and prevent us from seeing our brothers and from recognising the Lord in them. At times this indifference and this hostility lead to aggression and insults: 'Send away all these people!' 'Take them somewhere else!'. This aggression is what the people showed when the blind man cried out, telling him to be quiet.

The Gospel says that some people in the crowd explained to the blind man the reason why there were so many people there: "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by". The verb used is the same one that describes the passing of the Angel, the destroyer who will save the Israelites in Egypt. It is the Paschal passing, the beginning of liberation: when Jesus passes, there is always liberation, there is always salvation. "It is as though his Easter was announced to the blind man. And the blind man calls out, calling Jesus 'Son of David', the awaited Messiah who, according to the prophet Isaiah, would have opened the eyes of the blind. Unlike the crowd, this blind man

sees with the eyes of faith, and thanks to this his plea has a powerful effect. Indeed, upon hearing him, Jesus stops and orders them to bring the man to Him. In this way, Jesus removes the blind man from the side of the street and places him at the centre of the attention of His disciples and the crowd, thus performing a dual passage. First, the people had announced good news to the blind man, but wished to have nothing to do with him; now Jesus obliges all of them to be aware that the good news implies placing at the centre of one's own street he who had been excluded. Secondly, the blind man did not see, but his faith has opened his eyes to the way of salvation, and he finds himself in the midst of all those who had descended upon the streets to see Jesus. The passing of the Lord is an encounter of mercy that unites everyone around Him, enabling us to recognise who is in need of help and consolation."

Jesus then turns to the blind man and asks: "What do you want me to do for you?". The Son of God places Himself before the blind man as a humble servant. God makes Himself the servant of man, the sinner. And the blind man, when he answers Jesus, he calls Him not "Son of David", but "Lord", the title that the Church applies from the beginning to the resurrected Jesus. The blind man asks to see again, and his wish is granted. "Recover your sight; your faith has made you well". He demonstrated his faith by invoking Jesus and wanting to meet Him at all costs, and this led him to receive the gift of salvation. Thanks to his faith he is able to see and, above all, he feels he is loved by Jesus. Therefore the passage ends, "immediately he recovered his sight and followed Him, glorifying God": he becomes a disciple. "From beggar to disciple, this is our path too", affirmed Francis. "We are all beggars, all of us. We are always in need of salvation. And we must all take this step from beggar to disciple. In this way the blind man begins his journey as a follower of the Lord, and begins to form part of His community. He whom they wished to silence now bears witness in witness of his encounter with Jesus of Nazareth, and 'all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God'."

This is followed by a second miracle: what happened to the blind men led the others, finally, to see. "The same light illuminated all, bringing them together in prayer of praise. In this way Jesus pours His mercy on all those whom He meets; He calls them, He makes them come to Him, He brings them together, He heals them and He enlightens them, creating a new people who celebrate the wonders of His merciful love. Let us too be called by Jesus, and let us allow ourselves to be healed by Jesus, forgiven by Jesus, and let us follow Him, praising God", exclaimed the Holy Father at the end of his catechesis.
