

'We cannot truly know another person unless we can to some extent become that other person, experience the subjectivity of the other person as our own.'

Thomas Merton, p 91, 'Redeeming Time'

The marvel is that Jesus does this, but without sin, knows us as sinners, yet loves us all the same. This is expressed in the letter to the Hebrews in terms of Christ being appointed by the one who sent him to be both Son of God and a priest of Melchizedek – close to God and close to us as a high priest who, although 'taken out of humankind', in his role as priest, remains close enough to us to be able to 'sympathise with those who are ignorant or uncertain because he too lives in the limitations of weakness', described elsewhere as having been 'tempted in every way that we are but without sin'. The letter to the Hebrews then goes on to explore at some length this priesthood of Jesus, this ability in a sense to stand between us and God and act on both God's and our own part, that is to bring sinful humanity into the presence of the all-holy God, to be mediator, that is, of a new covenant. And how does Jesus do this but by dwelling in God's love, that is remaining in the love of God which is for us a grace but for him part and parcel of his very nature. And so he can see the blind man, Bartimaeus for who he truly is – not simply 'son of the unclean' (the literal translation of his name) but a man who is essentially faithful, already on the Way, already graced with the sight and knowledge of Jesus as 'Son of David'. This is where our belief in Jesus as Son of God and Son of Man cannot simply be mere repetition of a credal formula but has to well up from a much deeper place in us where grace is at work converting sin into love. 'O happy fault' we say at Easter in recognition of this process of conversion but remembering also Paul's admonition to us on Wednesday that this does not mean that we are free to sin. 'By no means' he says in one translation. Just because we are now under the law of grace, that is, living within its freedom, at last allowing grace to bubble up in us, this means we are no longer to be slaves to sin but slaves to love, following love wherever it takes us rather than sin. This is the journey Bartimaeus has now embarked on, the journey of learning to love more and more, to become skilled at seeing where Christ is leading him, and to see other people too truly as they are – fallen and yet still lovable, to be coached and encouraged too in the art of love, and in finding others still lovable finding oneself lovable too. Or, to finish once more with Thomas Merton, *'the human person cannot be known outside the empathy and identification which are provided only by love'* - a love which only God can provide.

'For I am a father to Israel and Ephraim is my first born son'

Br John Mayhead
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