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### **Meditation on Matthew 9:27-31**

What a display by the two blind men in today's Gospel! They seem to act with great confidence and self-assurance together. They do not wait for someone to call them to Jesus and bring them to him – no, they cry out loudly for him. They do not remain shyly in the background or show any hesitation – instead, they follow Jesus into a house. They do not start stuttering or become speechless with excitement when Jesus addresses them – they answer clearly and without hesitation, which is approved by Jesus since he rewards their answer with the healing of their blindness, or rather, their answer is the condition for the healing. Then they do something else that could be seen as disobedience, but just as easily as an act of self-determination, when they resist Jesus' instruction to remain quiet. In any case, they clearly do not do so out of malice, but to spread the glory of Jesus.

Looking at Jesus, he does not seem to mind the confident and determined behaviour of the two blind men; after all, he heals them. He does not reject them but invites them into his house, offering them some privacy and a safe space away from the undoubtedly curious witnesses of a crowd that, it can be assumed, was just as fascinated by sensations (like miraculous healings) then as it is today. Two aspects of Jesus' healing of the blind men are especially worth noting. Firstly, Jesus gives the two blind men an active role. They are healed because they stand firm and express their trust and faith in Jesus and his authority. Secondly, by telling them to remain silent, Jesus clearly makes it clear that he does not want to be the centre of attention. The healing of the two blind men is meant solely for their benefit; it is an end in itself. The emphasis is not on the healer or helper, but on the healed, those who return to a freer, less burdened life.

Could this basic structure of the encounter with the two blind men in today's Gospel also serve as a model for how people affected by abuse and their supporters, as safeguarders, interact and cooperate? Probably yes! Let's take a closer look.

Safeguarders should follow Jesus' example by creating a safe space for those affected. Genuine encounters, meaningful exchanges, free speech, and unconditional listening do not belong on the public stage. Otherwise, those affected risk being abused again, with church representatives seemingly speaking to them but not genuinely for their benefit – only to maintain a good image. It must be clear in all words and actions of safeguarders and those affected: the affected are the decision-makers. They determine what is said and done, how, when, how often, and for what purpose. Interaction with those affected is not a mercy gesture from safeguarders, who cannot

demand subordination in any form. It is a matter of dignity and justice for those affected. Safeguarding professionals should also understand they are not automatically owed gratitude for their efforts. What matters most is the attitude of Jesus in today's Gospel. There is no need to make a big fuss about what safeguarders do. From a purely human perspective, this may be tough for some safeguarders to hear. But what's at stake is a spiritually motivated attitude towards those affected and a contribution to their partial healing. That must not be forgotten.

Let us now return to the two men in the Gospel from the perspective of those affected. They appear together. For victims, this highlights the importance of creating opportunities for victims to coordinate, share ideas, and support each other. Often, individual victims face a powerful institution with all its resources and have almost no chance in the fight for their rights. In this context, advisory boards for those affected, such as in a diocese or a group of dioceses, are essential. These boards also help ensure that the voices of those affected are clearly heard and cannot simply be dismissed. Those affected decide what they communicate and to whom. The more restrictions are placed on them, the more likely it is to be counterproductive for everyone involved.

The meeting between victims and non-victims of abuse presents a challenge for all involved. It can go entirely wrong if certain principles – such as those mentioned above – are not followed. However, it can also be a valuable experience for everyone.

#### **Prayer:**

Lord Jesus Christ, You are the salvation of the world. In Your words and deeds, You turn Yourself towards those who seek Your help and guidance. Let us do the same in following you. We want to be signs and instruments for the coming of your kingdom in this world, a kingdom of justice, peace and salvation.

#### **Question:**

How can I effectively support victims of abuse in my everyday life?