



**PRAY** Jesus, help us discover what it means to follow you. Help us trust in your healing, grow in our faith, and act in your Spirit. Thank you for all the people in our lives who guide us to you. Amen.

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# SPiRIT

# Changed

By Connie Fourré

# Forever



**T**he first time I saw “our” Bobby Brown was in August as I was heading into school for teacher workshops. I looked over at the sophomore football team out on the field practicing and saw an unfamiliar figure on the sidelines. Bobby was there in his wheelchair, yelling encouragement to the players as they ran through their drills.

I learned that Bobby was a new student at our school. A gifted athlete known for his enthusiasm and magnetic personality, he was supposed to be out on that field with the other players.

A fateful day a month earlier had changed all that.

Bobby and his sisters LaVonne and RaiChel were out together when they were caught in

the crossfire of a driveby shooting. LaVonne was shot in the legs, Bobby in the spine. RaiChel watched helplessly as her sister and brother’s lives changed forever.

I have never seen our students be unkind to someone with a disability, but I know that student life can leave some disabled students on the margins. Not Bobby. Whenever I saw him in the hall, three or four students usually surrounded his wheelchair, talking and laughing.

Bobby and his sister RaiChel quickly established themselves as part of our school community. Bobby was always himself—interested in people, his sense of humor quickly setting everyone at ease.

**W**hen Bobby spoke of his injury, there was no sense of awkwardness. He neither dramatized the situation nor tried to ignore it. In class I could count on Bobby to be honest and straightforward in discussions.

One day in class he talked about resentment. To outsiders, it seemed as though he had adjusted to his new circumstances almost effortlessly. On the contrary, Bobby said, “I struggle with resentment every day. I feel as

though I've been robbed of the life I was supposed to have."

Bobby wasn't born a hero; he became a hero one day and one decision at a time. He notes that victims of traumatic events often need to forgive themselves as well as the



perpetrator. "A lot of times we blame ourselves for something bad that happens to us. We need to forgive in order to be able to really overcome and move on."

Bobby's dreams of being an athlete changed on that July day, but his love for athletics did not. The first summer after the shooting, he and his family channeled their grief into founding an outreach program for kids.

**B**eyond the Court is a summer basketball program for center-city children, which teaches gun-violence prevention right along with free throws and teamwork. The first year the Brown family prepared for 200 children to attend the free clinic; 390 showed up. The clinic has been held every year since.

The Bobby Brown Violence Prevention Institute has expanded to include other programs. With the theme of "Each One Reach One," each program rests on faith in Jesus.

"You can't heal without God. I believe that through God we are all connected. With God's help, we can get along and

eliminate a lot of issues that divide us. We sneak that message in there," Bobby says with a smile.

The Institute sponsors an annual talent showcase and dance titled "My Brother's Keeper." Young people get the chance to show their positive attributes to the community and see themselves in a new way. Five hundred people attend this annual event.

**A**ll programs are free and open to anyone who wants to come. The Brown family works tirelessly to find funding and sponsors to keep the programs going. "We want everything to be first-class," says Bobby. "This may be the only meal a little kid has that day. We want them to know they are worth first-class treatment."

On most days, Bobby was a student at our school pretty much like everybody else. He wasn't always upbeat. Tragedies such as Bobby's draw attention and support in the beginning, but the everyday struggles can be tough. For Bobby something as simple as switching books at a locker takes longer—every single day, every single time.

Sometimes Bobby got frustrated or down. Sometimes he was late for class or missed altogether because he needed time to rest. In the toughest moments, his faith sustained him.

"Too often as human beings we get caught up in our situation," says Bobby. "Whether it's a parent's divorce, or lack of money, or feeling ugly, or in my case the shooting. We see our circumstances as four walls 30 feet high, so high we can't see out. We miss out on what God has planned for us, and we miss out on our future.

"When I got shot, my whole life changed. But circumstances are just an event, a moment in time. Instead of feeling boxed in by 30-foot walls, that event can be a wall just two feet high.

"We can continue to see God's plan, the goals and blessings that are there for us. Circumstances aren't eternal, they come to an end. Whatever the outward limits, they are just a moment we are going through.

**Spirit readers answered the question: Who is your role model? Why?**

St. Sebastian is my role model, as well as my patron saint. He was a Roman soldier, but he died for his Catholic faith. He makes me want to be the best I can. **Braden**

My role model isn't just one person. I look up to different people all the time. I take attributes from them that help shape the kind of person I want to be. **Gilbert**

Christine Sinclair is an amazing soccer player, maybe the best. She is my role model because she seems to know herself and her confidence is amazing. I hope one day I can be as respected and talented. **Mimi**

My role model is Angelina Jolie. She has seven kids, most are adopted from all around the world. She is an ambassador and cares about the suffering children in Africa and all developing nations. **Veronique**

My role model is Mary, Jesus' mother. I look up to her because she said yes to God. She put her full trust in God. **Shealyn**

My role model is my uncle Ted. About a year ago he was in a motorcycle accident and became paralyzed. He taught me that every life has value no matter what happens to them. **Camille**

My role model is L.A. Lakers player Kobe Bryant because of his love and passion for the game. I also play basketball so it was a joy to see him play, giving it his all. **Julian**

My mom is my role model. She has been going through leukemia and survived. My mom always makes the best of her time with me. She has this determination that makes me smile. **Michael**

# SUNDAY GOSPEL

30th Sunday in Ordinary Time

## Jesus gives a blind man sight.

**NARRATOR:** As Jesus was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a large crowd, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus (son of Timaeus) was sitting by the road. When he heard that Jesus of Nazareth was coming, he began to shout.

**BARTIMAEUS:** Jesus! Son of David! Have mercy on me!

**NARRATOR:** Many of the people scolded Bartimaeus and told him to be quiet. But he shouted even louder.

**BARTIMAEUS:** Son of David, have mercy on me!

**NARRATOR:** Jesus stopped.

**JESUS:** Call him.

**PEOPLE IN CROWD:** Get up. Jesus is calling you.

**NARRATOR:** Bartimaeus threw off his cloak, jumped up, and came to Jesus.

**JESUS:** What do you want me to do for you?

**BARTIMAEUS:** Teacher, I want to see again.

**JESUS:** Go, your faith has made you well.

**NARRATOR:** At once Bartimaeus was able to see and followed Jesus up the road.

Mark 10.46-52

“That doesn’t mean we don’t have feelings about what happens to us. The shooting and its effects hurt—and it still hurts. But I’m still going to live my life according to God’s plan.”

Bobby graduated from high school and went on to Augsburg College, where he became president of the student body. He laughs when recalling his final address to the Board of Regents. “Past student body presidents maybe were intimidated by the group, but I told it like it is.” Bobby used his influence to advocate for even greater sensitivity for people with disabilities on his college campus.

**B**obby’s courageous response to the events in his life has drawn media attention. On the tenth anniversary of the shooting, the mayor of Minneapolis officially proclaimed July 15 as Bobby Brown Violence Prevention Day. The event powerfully impacted the family. Bobby says, “It felt like we reclaimed that day—it’s something we own now. We are no longer victims. We’re still here, and we can do all things in Christ. That’s not just a cliché, it’s reality.”

Bobby graduated with his girlfriend Andrea and his family at his side. Of Andrea, he says, “She’s the one. But my mom always taught me you take care of your family, and I need a

profession to make sure I can do that.” He’s beginning a Master’s program in psychology, and hopes to go on to a Ph.D. “I’ve always been in the helping field, and I think this is the way I can do the most good with my life. I want to help people who have been through traumatic experiences—to help them know there is life on the other side.”

Bobby’s faith includes a belief in miracles. He and his family firmly believe he will walk again one day. They are optimistic that God’s grace and new discoveries in modern medicine may hold the secret to healing. In the meantime, nothing stops his spirit.

“A lot of times we **BLAME OURSELVES** for something bad that happens to us. **WE NEED TO FORGIVE** in order to be able to really overcome and **MOVE ON.**”

My role model is St. Michael, the archangel. He used courage and strength to drive Lucifer from heaven. I think it takes that same kind of courage and strength to drive away temptation today. *Michael*

My role model is Jesus. He always respected everyone even if they were rude, poor, diseased, etc. Jesus was not a show-off and he died for us. *Kenneth*

My older cousin is my role model. Although she has made many mistakes in her life, she owned up to them. It inspires me to learn from my mistakes and to become a better person. *Marisol*

My dad is my role model. It seems like he is always there to give some of his free time to help with my school work or with training or advice for sports. He never runs out of patience. *Marissa*

## QUESTIONS

**1** Why does Bobby refuse to accept his disability as a limitation? **2** How does his faith in Jesus affect Bobby’s attitude? **3** Who do you admire for how they handle the walls and challenges in their lives? **4** How are Bartimaeus and Bobby Brown alike? **5** In what ways is Bartimaeus the ideal disciple? **6** What do you imagine is the rest of Bartimaeus’ story as he follows Jesus up the road?



# What does being a Catholic Christian mean?

Lay out an imaginary line in the room. One end of the line is “strongly agree” and the opposite end, “strongly disagree.” Each person takes a position, representing the degree to which he or she agrees or disagrees with the following statements. Discuss each statement from where you stand. Do it first as Christians and second as Catholics.

## Christians

- Know bible verses by heart.
- Keep the laws of the Old Testament.
- Take the bible literally—God made the world in six days.
- Believe Jesus is the Son of God.
- Believe Jesus rose from the dead.

## Catholics

- Abstain from sex before marriage.
- Show their love for one another.
- Take the pope’s teachings seriously.
- Accept believers of every faith.
- Pray and thank God every day.

insisting, “Your situation is not too big for God. If you believe that, it’s not too big for you.”

Faith is both a noun and a verb. As a noun, faith is what we believe; for example, Jesus is truly human and truly divine. As a verb, faith is setting our hearts in trust.

In the act of faith we adhere to Jesus and to God. To adhere means to glue, to stick with, to cling to. To believe is to believe and belong to God and to Jesus.

Unity among Christians is one reason Pope John XXIII called a meeting of the bishops of the whole Church, the Second Vatican Council. For some people unity means every Christian becomes Roman Catholic and follows the pope. Today after 50 years of dialogue among Churches, we value diverse ways to be Christian and seek to understand each other.

The Catholic Church respects all who seek God. The Apostle Peter baptized the first Gentile, a Roman centurion when he saw the man’s faith and said, “At all times and in every nation anyone who fears God and does what is right has been acceptable to God” (Acts 10.35).

The term Christian rightly belongs to all who believe Jesus is the Christ, the messiah. “Are you a Christian?” has sometimes been a loaded question. Some bible-centered Christians regard only those who experience a conversion and accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior as real Christians.



These denominations baptize people when they personally decide as teens or adults to submit to the authority of Jesus Christ. Taking Jesus as one’s Lord and Savior is the formula for making this personal commitment.

Catholics baptize babies into membership in the Christian community; parents promise to teach their children about Jesus. For Catholics conversion happens over our lifetimes as we celebrate Eucharist together and seek to become like Christ, whose love we celebrate.

The reformers at the time of the Protestant Reformation made the bible their sole source of faith. Protestant Christians emphasize the bible more than the sacraments. However, today Catholics hear the bible at Mass in their own language and read and reflect on the bible in groups as Spirit groups do.

Bartimaeus in the gospel and Bobby Brown in the story exemplify believers who act on their faith. Bartimaeus follows Jesus up the road to Jerusalem. Bobby inspires us with his faith,

Faith in Jesus commits us to live as he lives—to love God and one’s neighbor as one’s self. This relationship shapes our lives and can sustain us in difficult times. Our choices to be like Jesus shape who we become.

## FAITH in ACTION

- 1 Talk with a person who has faced serious challenges. Invite the person to talk about ways he or she may have struggled with faith or how faith has helped in facing the challenges.
- 2 Invite a teen group from another church to join your *SPIRIT* group to reflect together on the gospel. Identify at the end what each group learned about the other.
- 3 Tips for talking with non-Catholic friends: Agree to disagree. Don’t criticize or make fun of a friend’s church or spiritual practices. Support your friends in the practice of their own faith, and practice your own. Be ready to answer questions about the Catholic Church.