

39 Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C July 10, 2022
Deuteronomy 30:1-14 Psalm 69 Colossians 1:15-20 Luke 10:25-37

The story of the Good Samaritan is the heart of today's Gospel. A lawyer asks Jesus, "*And who is my neighbour?*" This is a trick question. To the Jews, "*a neighbour*" meant a fellow Israelite. What the lawyer really wants to know is if the Samaritans and Gentiles are also his neighbour. Jesus does not give a direct answer.

Instead, Jesus gives us the beautiful parable of the Good Samaritan. This parable is so familiar and so powerful that it has given an expression to our language. At times we call someone a Good Samaritan. To say that someone is a Good Samaritan is to say that the person helps people in need.

In the parable Jesus paints a portrait of what it means to be a good neighbour. Jesus begins the parable with "*A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho . . .*" Jesus doesn't attach any religious or social label to the man. Was he a good man or a bad man? Was he an important man or an unimportant man? These questions are irrelevant. The man is a human being. That's all that matters.

Jesus continues the parable saying the man "*fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead.*" Here we are dealing with heartless, violent people, who prey on the weak. Jesus lived in the real world. He knew that such people existed. We know about many of them too in our own day and age.

A Jewish Priest and a Levite pass by on the other side of the road, because to touch the half-dead body would have meant their exclusion from religious service in the Temple. They don't even feel compassion for the wounded man. Their brand of worship is not inspired by the love of neighbour but by religious duty.

To His parable Jesus gives an unexpected twist. Jesus says a Samaritan sees the man and is moved with compassion. The Samaritan stops and helps the man who has fallen in with robbers and proves himself to be the kind of neighbour Jesus has in mind. This Samaritan tends to the wounds of this stranger, place him on his own mule, take him to an Inn, pay for his care and promise to check up on him when he returns that way again. A man's life is saved. His actions are the ultimate answer of who is my neighbour.

The Jews who hear the story are in shock, because the relationship between the Samaritans and the Jews is strained. They see them as traitors and heretics. In the eyes of the Pharisees, Samaritans were unclean, and any Jew who spoke with or touched a Samaritan would carry the same label.

The early Fathers of the Church saw in the person we call the Good Samaritan an image of Jesus Himself. The human race has become laden down by sin. The greatest sin today is the loss of the consciousness of sin. Sin has stripped us of our dignity as human beings. It has robbed us, taking from us the grace of God. It has attacked us so severely that without Jesus in our lives, we are like persons who are half-dead.

Jesus sees us half dead to sin and He lifts us up, not on a beast like the Good Samaritan did, but on His Cross, and He brings us to His Church so that we can be cared for until He returns in glory on the day of our resurrection. The Church is our own *Inn* in which Jesus takes care of us.

After Jesus brings us to His Holy Catholic Church, He does not leave us as orphans to go on our own. Jesus is in His Church for all days even until the end of the world. Through the ministry of the Church in Baptism, Jesus heals the wounds of our sins, restores our life of grace, and gives us the dignity of the children of God. In Confirmation Jesus strengthens the life of grace within us. He confirms our identity as children of God and heirs to the kingdom of heaven.

In the Sacrament of Reconciliation Jesus heals us of our sins which have left our souls half dead. Jesus comes to us in His Church through Word and Sacrament. We find healing and hope when we listen to the Word of God in Sacred Scripture. We receive spiritual nourishment and, more importantly, the feeling of Christ's life within us when we receive Jesus in Holy Communion.

The word "neighbour" literally means someone who is near us. Jesus proves Himself to be more than a neighbour, more than someone who is simply near us. He has made us *part* of His Body, His Mystical Body, the Most Holy Catholic Church. When we lie wounded, Christ is the Good Samaritan who is always there to help us and who restores us back to life.

Now, how do we apply the story to our own lives? Are we willing to step out of our comfort zone by being Jesus hands to attend to the needs of someone else, even someone we do not like or respect? Are we willing to act in a way that is based in love, but may seem shocking to those observing our actions? Do we have the attitude of the Good Samaritan, Jesus, and act purely out of compassion, care and concern? Do we recognize that neighbour in our everyday lives?

We are walking on that same road to Jericho daily, only that road is right here where we are. How many people today lie wounded by the roadside of life in our world, in our community, in our church and in our homes? Do we act like the Jewish Priest and the Levite who pass by the person lying half-dead at the side of the road? Or do we act like the Good Samaritan in today's parable. It means to end racism by excepting all people as our neighbour.

Perhaps someone you meet has been wounded in wanting forgiveness, in being hurt from gossip, in wanting someone to love him or her, in depression, in his or her loss of a loved one who has died. Maybe someone may just need a hug or perhaps a friendly smile or just someone to take time to listen to him or her.

Maybe someone is living but feeling half dead suffering from loneliness, or from being hurt, long term illness, old age, or drug or other addictions. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you see these people as He does, to hear what they aren't saying, and to have the kindness and compassion to stop and be a "*good neighbour.*"

I am reminded of a four-year old child whose next-door neighbour is an elderly man whose wife recently died. Upon seeing the man crying, the little boy goes over to his neighbour's yard, climbs up onto the man's lap and just sits quietly with him. When his mother asks him what he said to the neighbour, the little boy replies, "*Nothing, I just helped him to cry.*"

Each of us has the capacity to be kind and compassionate. Small opportunities to care come our way every day. It's within our power to say a kind word, to offer sympathy, to give support, to be compassionate. These are the little drops of "oil and wine" that can take some of the pain out of a wound. To do that, we must search for what is Christ-like inside ourselves before we can serve Him in others.

When we come upon our wounded fellow travelers, our compassion is tested. When you stop to take care of someone, to suffer with him or her, you are doing far more than just offering human kindness. You are becoming a vessel for Christ. Our Lord is ministering at that moment to both of you!

Being a neighbour means making a radical response to Christ; it is to act out of unselfish, compassionate love. It means acting on God's love that we carry in our hearts, and being bold, even shocking, in the risks we are willing to take in the name of neighborly love. It is love that articulates what is in our hearts.

The lawyer's question in today's Gospel was, "*Just who is my neighbour?*" Our Lord's answer to him and to us is, "*Don't worry about that. Just be a neighbour to the person in need who crosses your path.*" That person is our neighbour in God's sight. One message to us of the parable of the Good Samaritan is to be as good a Samaritan to others as Jesus is to us.

At end of the story Jesus asks the lawyer, "*Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man?*" The lawyer replies, "*The one who showed him mercy.*" Jesus says to him and to us, "*Go and do likewise.*" And since we are still on that road, we can carry out being a Good Samaritan by *also going and doing likewise.*