

15<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, C

WE ARE ALL NEIGHBOURS

*“Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers? ... The one who showed mercy to him. And Jesus said to him, ‘Go and do likewise’” (Luke 10: 36, 37)*

***The Context of the Gospel:*** On this 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle C, the Church invites us to reflect on one of the most popular parables of Jesus – The Parable of the Good Samaritan. This is another of the parables of Jesus exclusive to the Gospel of Luke. The parable extols the virtues of the Samaritan over the indifference of the Jewish Priest and Levite. Many scholars attribute Luke’s preference of the gentiles to the Jews in his narratives to the fact that he addressed his writings, the Gospel, and Acts of the Apostles, to Theophilus (Luke 1: 3; Acts 1: 1), who was, most likely, a Roman Official, who might have sponsored the writing and publication of the works of Luke for circulation among the Gentile Christians. Writing with the pen of Luke and the ink of a gentile, Luke, had to make the message pleasant to his immediate audience. Be this as it may, the message and the challenge of the parable before us today is unequivocal and very much needed for our time and for our society that has been robbed of its humaneness because of our insipid approach to one another.

***Why the Parable?*** There is a saying that “There is no text without a context.” To understand a “Text” properly, it is important to understand the “Context.” It was after the disciples had returned from their missionary experience, and while Jesus was still with His disciples and the crowd that “a lawyer” who was an expert and an interpreter of the Mosaic Law, stood up from among the crowd to ask Jesus: “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” His intention for the action is clearly stated by Luke, “to test” or “to disconcert” Jesus or put more pointedly, “to embarrass” Jesus. Being an expert of the Law of Moses, and having listened to all that Jesus had to say to the crowds, which were in contrast to what he and the other teachers of the Law were teaching; and seeing that the people were beginning to hold Jesus in a much higher esteem, a steam of jealousy must have been rising from within him; and since his pride would not let him, he decided to show off. Therefore, to demonstrate to the people that this commoner, this son of a carpenter, this illiterate from Nazareth knew nothing and was not worth their attention, he decided to throw this question at Jesus.

***Not So Righteous:*** Notice here how a good deed could become unrighteous because of a bad intention. The questions of the lawyer concerning eternal life and neighbour were very relevant because considering the gamut of laws and prescriptions in the Jewish religion coupled with the seeming ambiguity on the identity of neighbour in Leviticus 19: 18, there was need for clarification. But the intention of the lawyer, arising from personal pride and ill-desire to test, disconcert, confuse, and embarrass Jesus, was evil. Therefore, the whole deed was not right. How often have we fallen into the same error? How many times have we allowed our pride to rule and destroy our good deeds?

***Answering With A Question:*** In His wisdom, Jesus turned the question back at him saying: “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” Jesus was saying in effect: “Yes, you are an expert in the law. You should know the law better. Tell us what the law says. Tell us how you understand it.” And he answered: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.” His answer was a combination of the provisions of the law as stated in two different portions of the Torah – Deuteronomy 6: 5 and Leviticus 19: 18. Then Jesus said to him: “You have answered right. Do these and you will live.”

***“And who is my neighbour?”*** St. Luke tells us that to justify himself, the lawyer asked Jesus further: “And who is my neighbour?” In Leviticus 19: 18, there is a seeming equivocation as to the identity of a neighbour with the introduction of the expression “one of your people.” Hence, there was a need to ask for clarification from one who would know better. Jesus, in His characteristic way, told this timeless parable and then asked the lawyer to sift out the answer. In this parable there are four main characters: the traveller, the priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan. The traveller, who was a bit careless to embark on that lonely journey with his treasures on a dangerous winding, slopping road that was a notorious haven for bandits. No doubts, “he fell among robbers” who stripped him of his treasures, beat him severely and left him half dead. The priest, one expected to be compassionate and empathetic, came by, saw, and passed by the other side. He must have acted so because he did not want to be ritually unclean, according to the law of Moses (Numbers 19: 11) which states that he would be ritually unclean for seven days if he should touch a dead man. The law and his personal cleanness were more important to him. The Levite, one from the priestly family also “passed by the other side.” His indifferent action has the same explanation as that of the priest. Whenever we let the law take

prominence over human considerations, there is a misplacement of values. Remember, “the law was made for man, not man for law” (cf. Mk. 2: 27). It follows that the law is intended to serve man and his needs, not otherwise. Then came the Samaritan, one who was considered “less human” by the Jews. The one looked down upon was the one who “had compassion” and acted well towards the man who fell among the robbers. He went to the man, bandaged his wounds, pouring oil and wine; set him on his donkey and took him to an inn, gave them two denarii for their expenses and promise to pay more for whatever else they would have spent more. It is striking how one situation elicits different responses. It does not matter what the eye sees, what matters is how the heart sees and interprets it. Today, let us take time to reflect on seeing with the heart.

***The Real Neighbour:*** Then Jesus asked the lawyer, “Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbour to the man who fell among robbers?” To this the lawyer answered: “The one who showed mercy on him.” Notice, the lawyer did not say “The Samaritan” because the Jews were enemies of the Samaritan, who they considered second-class by all standards. They were a mixed race of Assyrians and Jews brought about by the Assyrian invasion and captivity of the northern region. Today, our world is still struggling with racism, hatred, intolerance, and prejudices that have blurred our vision and view of our common humanity.

***Dear friends,*** let me conclude with these insights from the treasury of our fathers in the faith. St. Augustine offers this allegorical interpretation of the parable: “The whole human race, you see, is that man who is lying on the road, left there by bandit’s half dead, who was ignored by the passing priest and Levite, while the passing Samaritan stopped by him to take care of him ... In this Samaritan the Lord Jesus Christ wanted us to see Himself.” We can also see ourselves in the man robbed: we have been robbed of our purity by the sin of our first parents, left unsaved by the law, but Christ came and took us up in our impurity, carried us into the Church, where we are washed with the waters of baptism, anointed with oil of the Sacraments, and restored by His Death and Resurrection. This New Life is His gift to us all. Therefore, let us go and do like the Samaritan.