

O. T. XV SUNDAY, JULY 11: Deut 30:10-14; Col. 1:15-20; Luke 10:25-37

A Scribe asked Jesus a very basic religious question: "What should I do to inherit eternal life?" In answer to the question, Jesus directed the Scribe's attention to the Sacred Scriptures. The scriptural answer is "love God and express it by loving your neighbor." However, to the scribe the word "neighbor" meant another Scribe or Pharisee - never a Samaritan or a Gentile. Hence, Jesus told him the parable of the Good Samaritan. Thus, the correct approach is not to ask the question "Who is my neighbor?" but rather to ask, "Am I a good neighbor to others?" In the second reading, St. Paul reminds us that, just as Christ Jesus is the "visible image of the invisible God," our neighbors are the visible image of Christ living in our midst, in short the invisible God dwells in every human being.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus presents three philosophies of life concerning our relationship with our neighbor:

1) The philosophy of the thieves who robbed the Samaritan: "*What is yours is mine; I will take it by force.*" This has been the philosophy of Marxism and other revolutionary movements, as it is of modern terrorist groups. In accepting this philosophy of life, the thieves, like their modern counterparts, terrorized others and exploited them, ignoring human rights and having selfish gain as their chief motive.

2) The philosophy of life of the Jewish priest and the Levite: "*What is mine is mine; I won't part with it.*" The priests were powerful upper-class authorities governing the Temple cult. The Levites were the priests' associates, who provided music, incense, sacred bread, Temple curtains and adornments. Misplaced zeal for their religious duty gave them a couple of lame excuses: a) "If the man is dead and we touch him we will be unclean for seven days (Numbers 19:11) and disqualified for temple service." Thus they saw the wounded man on the road, not as a person needing help, but a possible source of ritual impurity.

3) The philosophy of the Samaritan: "*What is mine is yours as well. I shall share it with you.*" The Samaritan was generous enough to see the wounded Jew as a neighbor. He ignored the long history of enmity between his people and the Jews.

We must remember that the road from Jerusalem to Jericho passes right through our home, parish and workplace. The Jericho Road is any place where people are being robbed of their dignity, their material goods or their value as human beings. It is any place where there is suffering and oppression. As a matter of fact, the Jericho Road may be our own home, the place where we are taking care of our mother or father, husband or wife, or even our own children. We may find our spouse, children or parents lying "wounded" by bitter words or scathing criticism or by other more blatant forms of verbal, emotional or physical abuse. Hence, Jesus invites us to have hearts of love. Jesus

is inviting us to have hearts of mercy for those who are being hurt or mistreated on any of the "Jericho Roads" of life.

We are invited to be people of generosity, kindness, and mercy toward all who are suffering. A sincere smile, a cheery greeting, an encouraging word of appreciation, a heartfelt "thank you" can work wonders for a suffering soul. Within every society, there is fear of those who are different, who have different religions, different colors of skin, who dress differently, or speak different languages. The invitation of the parable is to make them neighbors.

Anecdote: A Good Samaritan on highways: Thirty years ago, Tom Weller's car broke down as he was driving through Southern California . A stranger stopped to help Weller and would accept no payment in return for his kindness. Instead, the stranger asked Weller to return the favor by stopping to help some other stranger somewhere. Tom Weller took those words to heart. For the last thirty years, he has helped thousands of stranded people along Southern California 's highways. He never asks for payment; instead, Tom Weller leaves behind a small business card asking each person to help someone else in need. It has become his mission in life to pass on the kindness that was once done for him. (Charles Kuralt with Peter Freundlich. American Moments (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), pp. 74-75.)

JOKES OF THE WEEK

1) Danger of becoming a Good Samaritan: Shalom Aleichem tells a delightful story about an old man standing on a crowded bus. The young man standing next to him asked, "What time is it?" The old man refused to reply. The young man moved on. The old man's friend, sensing something was wrong, asked, "Why were you so discourteous to the young man asking for the time?" The old man answered, "If I have given him the time of day, next he would want to know where I am going. Then we might talk about our interests. If we did that, he might invite himself to my house for dinner. If he did, he would meet my lovely daughter. If he met her, they would both fall in love. I don't want my daughter marrying someone who can't afford a watch."