

Sunday July 10, 2022  
15th Sunday in Ordinary Time  
**Parishioner Reflection**

*By: Edel Reid*

This Sunday's gospel reading from Luke 10 is the well-known parable of The Good Samaritan. Most of us are familiar with the central theme: "Who is my neighbour?" (surely one of the most consequential questions asked of Jesus in His ministry). The parable down through the years has been absorbed into the secular culture to such an extent that the term "Good Samaritan" is often used in our everyday lexicon to describe someone who goes to the aid of a stranger in need.

Upon re-reading this important gospel passage, three phrases jump out at me: "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?"; "Who is my neighbour?"; and "Go and do likewise". The first two are questions put to Jesus by the lawyer, and the third is a very direct, clear commandment from Jesus to the lawyer, to the surrounding crowd gathered to listen to Jesus' teaching at the time, and of course to us, for all time.

In Luke 10, we are told that Jesus is approached by a lawyer. The lawyer wants to put Jesus to the test and see what He knows. Today we would call it a "gotcha" question. Now, as we know, lawyers are used to questioning witnesses to get to the truth; but this lawyer, (a scholar and doctor of the law), did not realize that in questioning Jesus, he was addressing The Witness par excellence – Jesus, the Son of God, Witness to The Truth. He asked Jesus what he should do to inherit eternal life; a question we should all be asking. When Jesus answered his question with a question "What is written in the Law?", the lawyer responded by quoting two Old Testament texts: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength (Dt 6:5 - a verse recited at least twice a day by all practising Jews at the time); and You shall love your neighbour as yourself (Lv. 19:18.) Jewish scholars of the Law at the time would have known that in the context of Leviticus chapter 19, verse 18, the word neighbour was open to interpretation, and the subject of much debate. Many interpreted it in a very narrow, restrictive way, to include just relatives, kin, family. The lawyer then asks for Jesus' take on the definition of neighbour, and we can only imagine his surprise and that of the gathered crowd when Jesus launched into a story about a man being mugged. Where on earth was Jesus going with this?

As is so often the case, it is helpful to be aware of the historical, political, geographical, and cultural backdrop when reading one of Jesus' parables, and indeed when reading the scriptures in general. First, the Samaritans were a community who lived in the region of Samaria. If you were to look at a map of Palestine in the time of Jesus, the land of Samaria is situated smack dab in the middle, between Galilee in the north, and Judea in the south. The irony is that Samaria is a geographical neighbour of Israel; but the Jewish people did not consider Samaritans their neighbours in any other way. In fact, Samaritans were looked down on by the Jewish nation and considered inferior. They had intermarried down through the years and were considered to have corrupted the Jewish race and religion. They worshipped on Mt. Gerizim, not on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, and associating with them would have been abhorrent to the lawyer and the gathered crowd.

Second, the terrain that is the setting for Jesus' parable is the road between Jerusalem and Jericho. This route is approximately 30 kms, with an altitude drop of almost 1000 m between Jerusalem and Jericho. As various scholars have pointed out, the phrase Jesus uses at the beginning of His parable - "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho" – can be taken literally. Three kms out of Jerusalem along this road was a town called Bethany. Up to that point in the road, everything was pretty safe and civilized; after that point, the vegetation ends and the terrain becomes rocky for a long distance. Along this road, there is an inn with the name "Good Samaritan" today. Over the centuries, apparently, assaults were frequent in this area even in broad daylight. Jesus could have been thinking about this stretch of road when teaching this parable. The lawyer and gathered crowd would also have been familiar with it and its dangers, and likely would have been conjuring up a vivid picture in their minds. This story was definitely going to have an impact on its audience.

Scholars have pointed out something interesting: as Jesus' audience listened to the story, most likely they would have also been inserting themselves into the narrative. They would have been looking for a character to identify with; after all, that is our human tendency. The scholars go on to suggest that the questioning lawyer would not have been able to identify with the priest, or the Levite, and he certainly would not have identified with the Samaritan. So maybe he was left to identify himself with the victim of the crime – the traveller who was set upon by robbers. And if that were the case, he was left imagining how on earth it happened that his mortal enemy was the one person on earth that came to his aid. In fact, this abhorrent, ostracized outcast saved his life – his enemy, the Good Samaritan, became his saviour. The characters in the story who were supposed to

be the “good guys” truly disappointed and made all sorts of excuses while the outcast supplied the surprise ending.

When Jesus finished his parable, he turns the tables on the lawyer again, and asks the lawyer to tell Him which character in the story proved to be a neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers. Although the lawyer couldn't bring himself to say “The Samaritan”, to his credit he correctly identified the character in the story who had shown “mercy” to the victim. A neighbour is someone who acts mercifully towards another – even a mortal enemy. Jesus commands us to go and do likewise and show mercy to those in need, regardless of nationality, social class, race, or religion.

This parable asks us to challenge our pre-conceived ideas, and to ponder two very important questions: 1. Who might be a neighbour to me? And 2. Who in my life is presenting me with an opportunity to act mercifully towards them and be a good neighbour?

With respect to the first question: be prepared; it may well be the person you least expect in your circle who will help you in your time of need, show you mercy, and save you. To be someone's saviour is to be the bearer of healing. With respect to the second question, I often hum the tune of a hymn I used to sing in school. The words of the chorus were:

Who is my neighbour? Who claims my word and deed? Anyone in need, Anyone in need!

Pope Francis calls the Church a field hospital. There are many among us who are feeling beaten down, helpless, half dead. They feel forgotten on the side of the road. They can no longer help themselves up. They don't seem to be able to lift themselves out of their own misery. In our holy field hospital, maybe we can do exactly as Jesus is exhorting us to do: show mercy, care for the wounds of others, and take them to a place of rest and healing. No more lame excuses. Be prepared to put ourselves out for others. The Church, in Her Wisdom, preaches the corporal works of mercy: feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, give shelter to

travellers, visit the sick, visit the imprisoned, and bury the dead. That's probably a good place to start.

The sources used for this reflection include writings and sermons from:

Msgr. J. S. Cla Dias, EP, Dr Brant Pitre, Bishop Robert Barren, Fr. J. V. Corpora CSC