

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Gospel: Luke 10:25-37

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" 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." And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

REFLECTION 1:

WHERE DO WE FIND GOD?

The story is told about a traveller on a mountain path. He encountered a man lying face down. The traveller is concerned but passes on saying he has faith in the health care system. A second traveller sees the injured man and without stopping he hopes that help would arrive soon. A third traveller calls for help on his mobile phone. When the ambulance crew arrives a medical technician wonders if the fallen man has insurance. His colleague looks on and remarks 'If he hasn't got insurance we'll have to bill him for the call-out'. The familiar Good Samaritan story reminds us of the times in our lives when we were called to be good neighbours to someone. If our response was wanting, we can at least have faith and hope that in the future we will act with charity.

The readings for today would seem to pose the question as to where we should go to look for God. Do we go to a church to find God among the worn pews and the aroma of incense and flowers? Or do we find God in nature's cathedral – in the quiet forest, the mountains or by the sea? Perhaps we believe we can find God by looking within ourselves, where the spirit of God has chosen to reside. The ancient author of our first reading (Deut. 30: 10-14) would remind us that there is no need to fly to the sky, or sail the sea, God's presence in the law is already in our mouths and hearts and we for our part are to carry it out.

In today's Gospel (Luke 10: 25-37) Jesus invites us to find the presence of God in one another. Throughout the parable of the Samaritan who proved himself to be good, believers are taught to seek out the presence of God, not only in those we love, respect and admire, but also and especially in the poor and the victimised. The priest who saw the victim and passed him was probably thinking about God. Perhaps he was on his way to pray in the temple of Jerusalem. To enter this holy place, the priest could be ritually defiled by contact with a man who was bloody or perhaps dead. So it was with the Levite, afraid to risk his own holiness, he passed by on the opposite side of the road. We cannot judge their motives; we can only allow their actions to remind us of the times we may have acted similarly. The third man who encountered the wounded was a Samaritan. Samaritans were hated by the Jews and to be avoided at all costs. Nevertheless he showed himself a friend to the man who had been

victimised. With mercy he tended the man and with great generosity he provided for his care while he regained his strength. He is the one whom Jesus pointed out in response to the question, 'And who is my neighbour?'

While we cannot know fully the motivation of the Samaritan, we can surely consider our own reasons for helping others in need. First and foremost is the fact that Jesus has invited us to find him there, Pope Francis reminds us that 'where there are poor, hungry, thirsty, naked, homeless and otherwise victimised, Jesus is within them, waiting to be noticed, waiting to be nurtured, waiting to be loved, and waiting for us to allow him to live in us too'. When we minister to God's poor ones, we minister to God – we are touching the God who makes them and us. Our words must be gentle, respectful and kind. Our attitude must be merciful – nor are we to judge, criticise or assign blame. Our compassion must be personal so that those we serve do not feel themselves a burden. While we may agree on an intellectual level, that all others out there are neighbours, finding God by ministering to them, there is still the considerable challenge of acting on this conviction. 'You have only to carry it out', says the author of the first reading, 'Go and do likewise' says Jesus in today's Gospel. In so doing we will find not only neighbour, we will also find God.

REFLECTION 2: KNOWING AND DOING

The story of the generosity of the Good Samaritan is a real challenge for most of us. Living our lives here on earth is a full-time job, especially if we are thinking about heaven. We may feel that we don't have the time, energy and money to help strangers, even though the Commandments teach us to love our neighbour as we love ourselves. But if we skip helping our neighbour, we may actually be passing God by.

I remember a retired doctor who regularly pressed a €50 note in the hand of a restaurant owner saying; 'Give someone deserving a good meal, but don't mention my name'. That doctor was practicing what we make call 'random kindness'. Random kindness is capable of generating a tidal-wave of goodness just as 'random violence' spreads hatred and destruction.

It is one thing to know something; it is entirely another thing to act on that knowledge. Indeed it is a great feat of will to go from knowing to acting. You see, knowing is safe and requires little or no risk. Knowing is the stuff of committees who talk endlessly about an issue but seldom decide to take action. Knowing is comfortable, full of hope, promises and good intentions - but knowing will take us nowhere unless we are willing to take the first step, the first attempt towards doing. Doing on the other hand, reveals who we are and what we stand for - it requires courage and strength, because doing can get us into trouble. Doing must be fuelled by faith and prayer and in order to be authentic, doing must persevere.

Today's sacred texts show that God is aware of the human struggle to transform knowing into doing. Moses is featured as speaking for God, imploring the Israelites to take to heart the precepts of the lord. These precepts, these ten commandments are already in their hearts and minds, now they were to carry them out.

Today's Gospel features the Good Samaritan, who along with two others chanced upon a man lying by the roadside, stripped, beaten, robbed and half-dead. A priest and a Levite saw the man, and of course they realised what they had to do. But knowing didn't move them to doing it; so they passed by on the opposite side of the road. Perhaps they were on their way to the Temple and were afraid of being

'defiled' by touching a half-dead man, so delaying them for service by having to undergo ritual purification. But we can admire and emulate the Samaritan who came upon the scene, saw and knew what was needed and then allowed compassion to move him to do what he could. His compassion moved him to act - he did not hold back.

Pope Francis, in one of his famous homilies, pictured the Church as like 'a field hospital after a battle'. It should be 'like a nurse who heals wounds, one at a time, a ministry of mercy that washes, cleans, relieves and heals both body and spirit'. St. Paul put it graphically in his letter today (Col. 1: 20) 'Christ made peace by the blood of his cross'.