

## Say, who is your neighbour?

**15<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Year** – Cycle C – 14 July 2019

**Readings:** Deut 30:10-14; Col 1:15-20; Lk 10:25-37

*“You must love the Lord your God with all your heart ... and your neighbour as yourself” (Lk)*

### Three Scriptural Signposts:

1. “*Who is my / your neighbour?*” could be the query-thread running through the liturgy and the readings of today. In the First Testament, the love of God is shown by strict observance of the Law, as seen in the first three dictates of the Decalogue (Ten Commandments). The books of Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy are replete with rules and regulations which are ‘cut in stone’, so to say, in the Mosaic Covenant. The Mosaic Covenant is for a select and elect group: the people of Israel who see themselves as ‘special’ in the eyes of God. The first reading is part of Moses’ farewell discourse where he urges Israel to renew the Covenant—to “turn to the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.” Moses reminds the people that God loves them and is close to them. Thus, God’s Law must neither be seen as something up in the heavens nor beyond the seas, but “it is in your mouth and in your heart.” Remember that the prophets also echo God’s call for interiority: “I will put my law within them and I will write it upon their hearts” (Jer 31:33). The first reading prepares us for today’s gospel.
2. The gospel passage tells us that, “to put Jesus to the test,” the lawyer asks: “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Sensing that the man is trying to test him, Jesus answers him with another question: “What is written in the law?” Expert that he is in the Law, he replies, “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 (Deut 6:5); and your neighbour as yourself (Lev 19:18).” When Jesus exhorts him follow this law, still “wanting to justify himself”, he asks, “And who is my neighbour?” Did he really not know this answer? Surely, he did! But perhaps he wanted to test Jesus further in order to see how he might trap him or expose his allegedly erroneous teachings in public. But Jesus was wary of his ways, and far wiser. He decided to tell the famed story of the ‘Good Samaritan’ that—besides the parable of the ‘Prodigal Son’—is unique to the gospel according to Luke and powerfully convey lessons of love, mercy, and compassion. The details of the story are excellent points for catechesis.
3. Neighbour, for any Jew of Jesus’ time, simply meant a fellow-Jew. These Jewish ‘neighbours’ of the Jewish community formed a closed circle of Covenant people—ritually pure, holy, Law-abiding, Temple-going, chosen and destined for eternal life. Priests, Levites, Pharisees and Scribes had built segregating walls around this cozy circle, imperious and impervious to the so-called ‘pagans’, the defiled, Gentiles and Samaritans. Being ignorant of divine law, the latter were despised by the former. Yet, when the time came to test the depths of human goodness, kindness, care and compassion, the holiest of the holy people—namely, the priest and the Levite—“passed by on the other side”. These ‘passersby’ *know* the Law and will recite it even in their sleep! Yet, a Samaritan—who by no stretch of imagination can be called ‘neighbour’—“was *moved* with compassion”. Compassion isn’t just an act of charity that might cause one to toss a coin into a beggar’s

bowl. Rather, compassion entails involvement and relationship. Says the Samaritan, “Look after him; and, on my way back I’ll make good any extra expenses!”

**Possible Link in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading:** In asserting that Jesus Christ is the “first-born of all creation” and that “all things were created through him and for him,” Paul presents a captivating cosmic vision that breaks boundaries and builds reconciliatory bridges among individuals and communities. Through Jesus, God is pleased to “reconcile to himself all things.” Indeed, everyone is sister, brother, friend and neighbour.

### **Two Texts from Catholic Tradition:**

Christian Martyr Origen (d.254 AD) in his ‘34<sup>th</sup> Homily on the Gospel of Luke’ taught: “The man who set forth is Adam, Jerusalem is Paradise, Jericho the world, the thieves the invisible powers, the priest the Law, the Levites the Prophets, the Samaritan Christ, the wounds disobedience, the beast of burden the Body of Christ, the inn, which takes in every one, the Church, the Samaritan’s promise the second Coming of Christ.”

Pope Francis: “How can we be “neighborly” in our use of the communications media and in the new environment created by digital technology? I find an answer in the parable of the Good Samaritan, which is also a parable about communication. Those who communicate, in effect, become neighbors. The Good Samaritan not only draws nearer to the man he finds half dead on the side of the road; he takes responsibility for him. Jesus shifts our understanding: it is not just about seeing the other as someone like myself, but of the ability to make myself like the other. Communication is really about realizing that we are all human beings, children of God. I like seeing this power of communication as ‘neighborliness’.”

### **Two Current Concerns:**

The Circle Concern: Today, too many of us are preoccupied with forming and functioning within cozy ‘circles’ of ‘we’ versus ‘they’. We construct exclusive ‘circles’ which are narrow, divisive, and based on Manmade distinctions of class, caste, creed, country and culture. All these distinctions destroy the beautiful quality of human ‘compassion’ that refuses to ‘pass by’ but rushes in to serve and to save suffering humanity and a wounded mother earth.

The Good Samaritan Concern: The term ‘Good Samaritan’ has entered our common vocabulary. Jesus invites *you* and *me* to be one. But I have innumerable excuses to “pass by” – no time, no money, not now, I’m tired! It’ll involve a police case! I’m already late for Mass! Let someone else help! Suppose that man is only pretending to be wounded? What will people think if I take a wounded woman on my motorbike? Alas, I “pass by” too often. Can you and I—especially remembering that passerby priest and Levite—be ‘*moved* with compassion’? Compassion is not really logical. It transcends law and religion. It springs from the heart, from the depths of one’s being. It truly causes a churning in one’s insides.

### **In Lighter Vein:**

A man watching TV said, “I see so much of evil and violence in the world that I must *do* something about it!” His wife asked, “And, what will you do?” The man replied, “I’ll change the channel!” Too many of us ‘pass by’ – surfers, not servers, along Life’s Way, failing to tend to the wounds of human beings who suffer and need assistance.

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