

Homily of Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C

Jesus' character of receptibility and patience in his encounter with the scholar of the law is a challenge to us. It is clearly stated that scholar's questions to Jesus were ill-motivated. First, he "stood up to test Jesus." Jesus knew that, yet he calmly interacted with him. Second, he further questioned Jesus "because he wished to justify himself." Then, Jesus took time to give the parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus teaches us that the character of receptibility and patience produces harmony and takes us a long way where the attitude of impatience and rebuff will not take us. Impatience and rebuff can only produce bad blood.

Prompted by Jesus, the scholar answered his own question by quoting Deuteronomy 6:5, "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind." And Leviticus 19:18, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." The world is awash with various kinds of religions which express love of God; yet there is so much suffering in the world caused by hate and lack of love of fellow human beings. Hence, St. John laments, "If anyone says, 'I love God,' but hates his brother is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. This is the commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother" (1 John 4:20-21).

We express our love of God through our worship of him. But such love is incomplete if we do not love human beings who are God's image. Jesus says, "And the King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me'" (Matthew 25:40). Therefore, love of neighbor is love of God.

The two religious leaders (the priest and the Levite) in the parable of the Good Samaritan "passed by on the opposite side" and did not show love to the man who fell victim to robbers. A few suggestions are given as to the reason for their action. It is almost certain that the priest and the Levite acted in accordance to Numbers 19:11-16 that says, "Those who touch the corpse of any human being will be unclean for seven days; they shall purify themselves with the water on the third and on the seventh day, and then be clean. But if they fail to purify themselves on the third and on the seventh day, they will not become clean. Those who touch the corpse of a human being who dies and who fail to purify themselves defile the tabernacle of the Lord and these persons shall be cut off from Israel. ... Moreover, everyone who in the open country touches a person who has been slain by the sword or who has died naturally, or who touches a human bone or a grave, will be unclean for seven days." The priest and the Levite probably presumed that the man was dead. Therefore, the law forbade them from touching the victim.

It could be that the priest and the Levite knew that the man was not dead but they were in a hurry to meet up with some religious duty. Therefore, they had no time for the victim. Probably, they were not hurrying to a religious duty but could not sacrifice what it takes to attend to the victim as the Good Samaritan did. "He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them. Then he lifted him up on his own animal, took him to an inn and cared for him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction, 'Take care of him. If you spend more than what I have given you, I shall repay you on my way back.'"

The command of love of God through love of neighbor, as the first reading states "is not too mysterious or remote for you. It is not up in the sky, that you should say, 'Who will go up in the sky to get it for us and tell us of it, that we may carry it out?' Nor is it across the sea, that you should say, 'Who will cross the sea to get it for us and tell us of it, that we may carry it out?' No, it is something very near to you, already in your mouths and in your hearts; you have only to carry it out."

Our neighbor is the situation that requires our attention, and the person in need of our help. We are to approach rather than pass by on the opposite side due to some rule or law. St. Vincent de Paul says, "Charity is certainly greater than any rule. Moreover, all rules must lead to charity." Love of neighbor involves sacrifice of giving of time, talent and materials. It requires generosity. The Good Samaritan gives us a perfect example. Jesus says to us, "Go and do likewise." We are people of faith. Our love of God and neighbor do not disappear into thin air. Somehow, someday, all the love we have given will come back to us.

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