

HOMILY ORDINARY SUNDAY 15 C (Homily 02)

“Be a Good Samaritan”

(Dt 30:10-14; Psalm 69 or 19; Col 1:15-20; Lk 10:25-37)

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There is a Chinese proverb that goes like this: If you want to be happy for an hour – take a nap. If you want to be happy for a day – go fishing. If you want to be happy for a year - inherit a fortune. If you want to be happy for life – help someone else.

Do you know the Great Commandment by heart, and that it summarizes the whole bible?

All we have to do as disciples of Jesus is to love God with our whole being, and love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

In the first reading, Moses stresses obedience to God and keeping God’s Word and God’s commands.

In the gospel, we see that Great Commandment illustrated through the story of the Good Samaritan. There is an interesting divine reversal in that story. Jesus turns the question around, from “Who is my neighbour?” to “Who is being a neighbour?” to the one in need. The question “who is my neighbour” limits love; the question “who is being neighbourly” expands it to all regardless of race or creed.

There is strong symbolism in this story: We are the wounded strangers; Jesus is the Good Samaritan. The Spirit is the oil; the wine the blood of Jesus, the inn the Church. Jesus will come again.

The road in the gospel story dropped 3,600 feet in 30 kilometres and was notorious for bandits. A Samaritan was considered a heretic and a breaker of the ceremonial law. At their worst, the Jews had a narrow definition of neighbour which meant fellow Jews. They would not help a gentile woman in childbirth since that was to bring another gentile into the world. The Jewish priest set ceremonial requirements above charity; the Levite put safety first.

The meaning of the story is that official membership and even high position in the established religion can be no substitute for the concrete deed of love for someone in need. This is a lesson of supreme importance.

The double command to love was not new with Jesus who derived it from the OT (Dt 6:5 and Lev 19:18) but Jesus preached its absoluteness. His final saying to go and do likewise repeats his saying in the previous parable, “Do this and you will live.” Jesus himself enacted what he preached by associating with those marginalized by society and religion.

Jesus’ parable shatters the stereotypes of social boundaries and class division and renders void any system of religious entitlement. Neighbours do not recognize any social class. Eternal life – the life of the age to come – is that quality of life characterized by showing mercy for those in need, regardless of their race, religion or social standing and with no thought of reward. Mercy sees only need and responds with compassion.

A young Oblate priest was travelling with his sister in late November trying to make their destination by midnight. They came upon a First Nations man standing under a light by a bridge, hitchhiking. The sister, who lived by a reserve and had developed a bias towards First Nations people, reacted in fear at the thought of picking him up. Her brother, who was a missionary among the First Nations, had the opposite reaction – he was relieved that it was a First Nations person and stopped to pick him up. It turned out that the man was a businessman who had taken a cab to try to catch a bus that he missed, and decided he could not afford to go further when the cab could not catch the bus. They had a great conversation with the man. After dropping him off at his destination, they came across a young Caucasian couple with a child in a stalled car near the sister’s home. The couple had foolishly run out of gas, so they took them to the sister’s residence, gave them some warmth and gas, and the young couple were on their way. Reflecting on this experience, the priest and his sister realized that they had just lived out the parable of the Good Samaritan, complete with the racial element, and had learned its lessons a little more deeply.

The Eucharist that we celebrate today calls us to make a commitment to be a Good Samaritan to anyone one in need. God cares for us, forgives us, heals us, binds up our wounds, and sends us out to do the same for anyone in need.

May we never forget that this Great Commandment to love God and anyone in need is our priority, and that to do so is to truly obey God's Word and live the central teachings of the whole Bible.