

Homily - 15th Sunday of the Year C

Today, we reflect on the story of the Good Samaritan. It shows that the love of God is necessarily connected with the love of neighbor. A scholar of the Law asked Jesus, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He was testing Jesus. He knew the answer from the study of the Law. Since Jesus knew the man was simply testing him, he directed the question to him, "What is written in the law? How do you read it?" The man responded, "*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 your neighbor as yourself.*" Jesus graded him an "A+", saying, "You have answered correctly; do this and you will live." Thus, the love of God and the love of neighbor go together. Thus, St. John writes, "If any one says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen" (1John 4:20).

The main problem, however, is with the second question, "Who is my neighbor?" This time, he was not testing Jesus; he was sincere. Though highly educated, he was confused by some teachings and personal opinions out there. For instance, he had learned that his neighbors were ONLY the people of his own nationality; others were enemies. Christ's new teaching challenged it, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven" (Matt 5:43-45). This is why our present world, with too many diverse opinions on right and wrong, is very dangerous. Scripture says, "There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death" (Prov 14:12; 16:25). Let us always stand by the teachings of the Church, for Jesus said to her through the apostles, "He who hears you hears me" (Luke 10:16).

"Who is my neighbor?" Responding, Jesus presented a dramatic story of the Good Samaritan. A traveler (irrespective of his racial, tribal, national, religious, or ethnic identity) fell victim to armed robbers. He needed help; he is a person created in the image and likeness of God. A Jewish "priest" and a "Levite", influenced by some erroneous traditions or ideologies misconstrued as God's Word, saw the man and avoided him. Apparently, they did not want any contamination with blood, lest they become unclean (cf. Lev 15:19, 25). But a Samaritan who did not have such wrong belief helped the victim. What a subtle indictment of the scribes and Pharisees for their incorrect interpretations of the Law! Jesus recommended to the scholar the actions of the Sa-

maritan, saying: "Go and do likewise."

What does this mean to us? Jesus was not only addressing the scholar; he is speaking to each of us today, saying, "Go and do likewise". This command does not only apply to victims of robbery; it applies also to the victims of the society – the poor, the marginalized, the oppressed, the abused, the victims of drugs and alcohol addiction, etc. See how Christ spelled out our mission: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18-19). It is a holistic mission! It is the Good American's mission!

Furthermore, the story does not only apply to the victims of the society in the physical sense; it obliges even more in the spiritual sense. In this case, Jesus becomes definitely the "Good Samaritan, the Good American". The devil and his agents (demons) are the robbers. All people were victims of the devil and his agents through Original Sin and personal sins. The devil wounded all terribly; all were on the verge of eternal death. Jesus, the Good American, intervened. He declared, "The thief comes only to steal [people's souls] and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10).

As Christ's witnesses, we are enjoined to be Good Americans to our people. Many people unknowingly have fallen into the hands of the devil who robs and strips them of their true Christian identity and dignity and leave them spiritually helpless, with no prayer life, no going to Church, and no attention to God any longer. What a pity! Beloved, it is our job to seek out and save such distraught persons, wherever they are. It does not matter which nationality, race, or ethnic group they come from. That is why our Church family of John the Baptist reaches out to all: Whites, Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, etc; all are welcome in this place. Let us reach out, each person, and bring at least two people to Church within the next six months. The Church is the "Inn" where the spiritually wounded are treated, healed and restored to baptismal dignity. Please, respond to Christ's command today!

Finally, to do nothing, look the other way, or discriminate, is comparable to the attitude of the Jewish priest and Levite in today's gospel. Let not political or ethnic sentiments, erroneous traditions or ideologies and incorrect personal opinions, make us forget our divine mission in the world. May the Lord be our portion and inheritance through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.