

14th July 2019 (15th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C)

Deuteronomy 30:10-14; Psalm 68(69):14,17,30-31,33-34,36-37; Colossians 1:15-20; Luke 10:25-37.

'Go, and do the same yourself!'

An expert in the law of Moses – a theology professor – asked Jesus: what is the essence of Judaism? What is it that I need to do in order to be part of God's kingdom? We can very easily transpose this question into: what is the essence of Christianity? How do I live as a good Christian?

Jesus threw the question back at the expert: what does the law of Moses say? And the answer given was perfect: love God and love your neighbour! The expert in the law knew his theology, all that he had to do is to live what he preached: do this and you will be fine. At this stage probably Jesus turned around to move on, but the lawyer asked another question: and who should I consider as my neighbour? When should I stop loving?

Jesus came up with a beautiful story of a man – John Smith – who is attacked by thieves, robbed, beaten and left by the side of the road to die. Two people – Fr Brown, the local parish priest and Joe Green, the parish organist – happened to pass by. Fr Brown was running late for Mass, there was a whole congregation waiting, he had no time to waste, so he looked away and hurried along. Joe Green was also expected at Mass to lead the parish choir. There would be no singing without him; he decided to keep going.

A Muslim refugee was passing by, he saw John Smith by the road and felt sympathy for him. The Muslim refugee knew what how it felt to be abandoned and in pain. He too was suffering, feeling marginalised in his newly adopted country. He stopped and tended to John.

Who of the three accepted John Smith as their neighbour?

This parable is certainly as relevant today as it was in Jesus' time. People who live in the mainstream of life often find it difficult to look at people who are living on the margins, abandoned by the wayside. Jesus invites us to stop, look and touch those who are in pain in our midst.

In some ways this is also the Jesus story. Through our sins we are like the man attacked by robbers and left to die on the side of the road. Jesus – God – comes out of his way, is born as one of us, in order to save us and take us home with him. The compassion of God goes beyond any human expectations.

My job as a Christian is to be the love of God by reaching out to my neighbour. There are many in our midst who feel marginalised and isolated. Do I find time to stop and listen to their pain or am I too busy with my own '*good works*' to waste time with those in need? There are organised ways where we can help: Vinnies, Heidelcare, the hospital, and many other initiatives; there are also private ways where I can reach out and be with those in need.

One issue with Jesus' parable is that the person being neighbour to the one in trouble is a Samaritan, a person despised by Jews! Samaritans were considered to be unbelievers, the worst among sinners. Yet Jesus tells us that he was the one who stopped to help. In life we are often blinded by our prejudices; we box people and judge them before we even meet them. We need to remember that they too are children of God and have the love of God within them!

The question is not 'who is your neighbour,' but rather, 'who do you choose be neighbour to?' In Jesus' language, the term neighbour is no longer a noun and an object, but rather a verb, an action word. When I choose to be neighbour to someone else, I choose to be God and God's love to them!

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