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Homily at Mass 15th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year C – 14 July 2019

Many familiar and favourite Gospel stories are unique to the Gospel of St Luke. The story of the Good Samaritan – today’s Gospel parable – is one of them. “The Gospel of mercy is the Gospel of St Luke” says the 5th century Pope St Leo the Great. The Gospel of mercy which flows like a stream in flood from the heart of Christ our Lord. The Gospel of Mercy which will not allow our poor human race to be abandoned, left injured and hopeless on the side of the road of history. Rather Christ, our merciful Lord, the Good Samaritan, comes to our aid with the healing balm of the sacraments, and finds us a home, rest and shelter in the hostel which is the Church, our Mother and Teacher.

The coastal town of Pompeii, outside Naples just south of Rome, was destroyed by the eruption of Mt Vesuvius in AD79. When the city was rediscovered in the 18th Century archeologists found the drains of the city clogged with the aborted fetuses of baby girls. The New Testament and early Christian history shows that Christianity grew in the 1st Centuries in ancient Rome and elsewhere because the Gospel gave women dignity, it honoured marriage and the family, and though unable to grant slaves freedom it reminded slaves, who were regarded by their pagan masters as no more than walking talking tools, that they were the children of God, and the Church taught slave owners to treat their slaves with respect, and to see them as equals in dignity; like them, sons and daughters of a Good Father.

Are our children looking forward to going back to school on Monday? Did you know that the word ‘holiday’ comes from two words ‘holy day’? In the middle ages the Church provided for hard working villagers by declaring that certain feast days and saints days were to be free of work, like Sundays, so that ordinary people could rest from daily labour, come to the church for Mass, and spend the day ‘re-creating,” restoring their energies, refreshing their minds, enjoying the company of family and friends.

At the same time opportunities for education were growing and health and medical care were being developed. In Europe, monasteries provided centres of learning along with experiments in domesticating animals and agriculture. Champagne was invented by a French monk from Dom Perignon. On these foundations civilization grew and expanded. There are stories and legends about monks like St Brendan who first went to sea seeking out new lands. The first man on Australian soil was celebrated by a Franciscan priest who accompanied a French exploration which arrived at Sydney just a few days after Capt Arthur Phillips and the First Fleet. At La Perouse in Sydney lies a grave of a French priest who had died, and for whom a Funeral Mass was offered at his burial in 1788.

As European explorers criss-crossed the Earth they founded colonies, ports for trade, and missionaries also came to preach the Gospel, baptise the people and build churches, schools and hospitals.

All of this is the work of the Good Samaritan throughout the Church's history – running to the aid of men and women in their need. St Mary McKillop understood this when she told her Sisters as they set up small schools and makeshift convents in the outback of Australia: “never see a need without trying to do something about it.” The Sisters lived this as they went out, often only in twos or threes, to care for aboriginal people, live in the small sacristies of country churches and teach children what Mary McKillop called her 4 R's: how to read, how to write, the basics of arithmetic, and especially their Catholic religion. The Sisters set out to visit families, and there are stories of their special care for priests in remote and lonely outback parishes.

A few weeks ago we learnt that euthanasia had been introduced in Victoria. At the time Archbishop Fisher (AD Sydney) wrote that Australians who are sick and dying need more care not less, more love not less. Today the Good Samaritan is called to offer generous palliative care, as well as a strong voice for those too weak to speak. The Gospel of Mercy calls us to defend and protect life, to stand up for the sick and dying, to spend ourselves and all we have – even our reputation – so that none should fear a doctor or a visit to hospital, as so many do it seems in places like Belgium and the Netherlands.

The Good Samaritan soothed the man's injuries with oil and wine. St Luke is careful to include in his Gospel parable these two signs of the Church's sacraments. With healing oil the Church brings comfort and hope to the sick and frail aged. This is the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. And the Samaritan poured out wine – alcohol – to sanitize the man's cuts and wounds. At Mass today, at the Altar and in the moment of our Holy Communion, Christ the Lord pours out his saving blood. “This is my blood,” Jesus says, “shed and poured out so that sins may be forgiven.”