

15th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

St. Luke 10:25-37

To understand more perfectly the story of the Good Samaritan it is necessary to understand the relationship that existed in Our Lord's time between the Jews and the Samaritans. The Samaritan people lived in the region of Samaria, which was to the north of Judaea, the region of the Jews. Samaritans were, in part, foreign colonists that had settled on Jewish lands, so the Jews saw them as some sort of invaders. The Samaritans, however, saw themselves as descendants of the early tribes of Israel who had managed to survive the foreign invasions of the armies of Assyria. In spite of a common ancestry, the Jews regarded the Samaritans as idolators whose religion was a mix of faith in the one true God and false gods. Rather than worship in the Temple in Jerusalem, as all Jews did, the Samaritans worshipped on Mount Gerizim, so separating themselves from the faith held by the Jews. As such, the Samaritans were contemptuously regarded by the Jews; they were outcasts and a people who had defiled religion. The Samaritans, on the other hand, regarded themselves as the true people of God, who practised a pure form of Judaism, and so regarded the Jews as their enemies. This is the context in which Our Lord situates His telling of what we call the "Good Samaritan." That title alone would aggravate Jews at Our Lord's time for there could be no such thing as a "good" Samaritan.

In this parable, Our Lord contrasts the act of the Priest and the Levite, who formed the upper echelon of Jewish religion and so were regarded as the most pious, against the act of the Samaritan, the enemy. Whereas the Priest and the Levite walk by the injured man, the Samaritan stops to help him and carries him to an inn where he pays for his keep and promises to make good on any other expenses incurred by the innkeeper. So what is the point?

Most clearly it is a story that to love one's neighbour is not something that is limited by borders of race or religion. More than that, its is a story that to love one's neighbour demands loving he or she who is my enemy. Today you and I might not speak of enemies, but we all feel that some people are against us and we against them. Often we justify our bitterness towards someone because of their behaviour or their beliefs or because of some injustice that we have suffered. To love one's neighbour does not mean that I must like my neighbour. Loving has nothing to do with liking. We are not called to like our neighbour. But we are called to love our neighbour, and that means we have a duty, because of our Baptism, and because we receive Holy Communion, to assist that person should they need help. That can grate against our conscience because we have no desire to help someone who has abused us. But whatever we feel about them, we have a responsibility to love. That is an act of heroism, an act of courage, an act that goes against what seems natural to us, but that is because it is something supernatural, for it relies on the grace of God.

In the story of the "Good Samaritan," you and I are that man who lies half-dead on the side of the road and Christ is the "Good Samaritan" that stops by us and picks us up and carries us to the inn, the Church, to be healed.

We have a duty to care for those in need, whether we want to or not. During war this is called giving aid and comfort to the enemy and is punishable by imprisonment or death. This shows what power such an act has; that for a man it means death, but for a man of faith it means life.