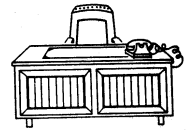


# 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 14, 2019



From the Desk of  
Fr. Romanus

Dear Parishioners, In this Sunday's gospel, we read about the familiar parable of the Good Samaritan. A lawyer asked Jesus, What must I do to inherit eternal life? This is a fundamental question to explore every now and then. Unlike most questions aimed at entrapping or exposing Jesus, there is no indication of hostility in the tone of this question. The assumption is that there are things we should do if we intend to inherit eternal life.

Jesus answers the question using the "Socratic method" of answering a question with a question. He asked him, "What is written in the law? How do you read it?" By referring to the Law, Jesus is directing the man to an authority they both accept as true and reliable - the Old Testament. The lawyer answers the question by quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, "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 affirmed the correctness of his response.

Then the lawyer wanted to limit the parameters of the law by asking, "And who is my neighbor?" In Greek, the word for neighbor, *geitonas*, means "a person living near or next door," while in Hebrew it means "someone you have an association with." These limited understandings of the word excluded Samaritans, Romans, and other foreigners as neighbors. Jesus posed the parable of the Good Samaritan to correct the false understanding of neighbor and one's duties toward a neighbor.

In Jesus time, the road from Jerusalem to Jericho was notoriously dangerous and difficult to travel alone. It was steep and winding with strategic points of ambush by robbers. People referred to the road as the "Way of Blood" due to the frequent shedding of travelers' blood by robbers. The parable turned the conventional wisdom of the time on its head. The first to come upon the wounded robber was a priest, and he passed by on the other side, leaving the man to his fate. Some argue that he probably thought that the man was dead and avoided touching him for fear of incurring ritual impurity. Contact with a corpse would hinder him from performing his temple duties. On the other hand, the depiction of travel route downhill (from Jerusalem to Jericho) indicates that he had fulfilled his temple duties and was returning home to Jericho.

The second person to come upon the wounded person was another official of the temple, a Levite, who also passed by on the other side. The argument for ritual impurity would not apply to the Levite, but he behaved exactly as the Temple priest and avoided contact with the wounded man. These were supposed to be the good guys and the heroes in the parable, but Jesus had a different hero in mind, the Samaritan. He came upon the wounded man and stopped to help. He gave his time, talent and treasure to assist the wounded traveler.

In Jesus' time, the Jews considered the Samaritans a low class because they intermarried with non-Jews, and did not keep all the laws. They established a rival priesthood and a temple on Mount Gerizim and claimed to possess true Judaism. The text does not say whether the injured man was Jew or Gentile, but it made no difference to this Samaritan. He simply saw a fellow human in dire need and sprang to action without hesitation. That is what it means to be a Christian. We have to overcome the tendency to stand by or not get involved when others are suffering and need our help. To be a Christian is to be involved, to be compassionate. Loving God is the easy part of religion - we say our prayers and try to do enough to keep God off our back. Loving our neighbor is more challenging and is where the rubber meets the road. Who have you helped lately? Have a great week!

Fr. Romanus