

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time, C – July 10, 2016 – Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham, Ala. – 5pm Sat. Vigil, 8:30am & 11am Sunday – 1,150 words

The parable of the Good Samaritan relates to Christ and it also relates to us. The Good Samaritan is, above all, a self-portrait of Jesus and what he has done for us – for the human family as a whole, and for each of us individually. Each and every member of the human race is like the man left on the side of road to die. Each one of us has been robbed of holiness and grace due to original sin – which we inherited from our first parents – and our subsequent actual (or personal) sins. Our selfishness and sins, and the sins of others, have deeply wounded our souls. We lay on the side of life’s path, and those who pass by, even if they did reach out to help us, are not capable of saving us. We lay broken and wounded by life in a fallen world, in need of a Savior.

In his Incarnation, Jesus comes to us like the Good Samaritan. He is the merciful Lord who heals and restores us with the oil and wine of his sacraments; who pays for our salvation with his own sacrifice on the cross at Calvary; who brings us to a place of rest – the inn – which is his Church. The Church watches over our convalescence and our growth into Christian maturity, until Christ comes again. And the Lord pays the innkeeper: he gives the Church his Holy Spirit as her guide, and the immense riches of his grace to distribute to all men, and he pledges to pay the full amount required. The Church therefore possesses the fullness of life and salvation.

And now we get to the heart of the matter. For if this parable is truly more than just a nice fable, but rather relates to Christ and to us directly, then its conclusion – “Go and do likewise” – takes on a greater imperative. If Jesus is *the* Good Samaritan, and commands us to go and do the same that he did, then it means that he wants us to continue his mission. We are staying in the inn: we are members of his Church. And this inn operates on something like a work-stay program: we have free lodging so long as we earn our keep, so long as we “go and do likewise”. This means we are not simply to go and do “random acts of kindness”; no, our purpose is not random at all: we have a very specific task, which is bring others to the inn, the Church.

This, if I may say so, is where we tend to get a bit uncomfortable. We live in a culture that has been overcome by the scourge of political correctness, and it affects us all to one degree or another. Out of a misguided sensitivity – a hyper-sensitivity, we might well say – we often tend to avoid making serious and clear distinctions; for example, between different religions. There is no shortage of people who make claims like, “all religions are basically the same”, or try to downplay the differences between various denominations. Very often, underlying all of this is the implicit claim that as long as you are trying to be a “good person” – whatever that means – then you are on the path to heaven.

But against this claim the Catholic Church quite confidently proclaims that she is the one true Church, founded by Christ himself. Presumably we are all here because we believe that. Yet, are we truly being Good Samaritans if we don’t try to lead others to see that as well? Are we being the kind of friend Christ has been to us – rescuing us when no one else could, at great personal expense – if we just downplay our differences and pretend that we are all basically the same, so long as we try to be good? This kind of attitude is pervasive today. And it’s not helping anyone.

When the Lord says to us, “Go and do likewise”, he gives us a very definite purpose: to reach out to fellow sinners, to rescue them from error, and to bring them to the fountain of life, which is the Church and her seven sacraments. This task is incumbent upon us all: first of all, by our daily prayers; second, by the example that we give by the witness of our own life; and third, by the words we speak to others. It’s easy enough to pray. It’s a bit harder to give a good

example, but we keep working on that. The third one – speaking to others and inviting them to come to the Church – is often the hardest. The problem is, we tend to see ourselves like that scholar of the law at the beginning of the gospel, who wished to justify himself: we think it all depends upon us. We think we have to say just the right thing, or know the answers to every question that is raised. We forget that the Lord sends us and wants to work through us. We forget what he said elsewhere in the gospel: “Without me, you can do nothing”.

In other words, being a Good Samaritan means that all three things that I mentioned – prayer, good example, and words – have to work together. Striving to live our faith daily, thus setting a good example for others, and inviting others to join us, have to all find their foundation in our intimate relationship of prayer with the original Good Samaritan, our Lord Jesus Christ. He will guide us, he will help us, he will work through us. But will we set aside hypersensitivities, political correctness, and other fears, and take that risk, opening our mouth to speak about our faith in charity? You know, in the gospel, what the Samaritan did was rather dangerous, because in Palestine at that time, one tactic that a criminal would use was to play dead on the side of the road, and as soon as someone approached to help him, a gang would jump out of hiding and assault him. The Samaritan thus took a risk. Will we also?

There is room in the inn; room for all, in fact. As we celebrate the Eucharist today and have a living encounter with Christ, *the* Good Samaritan, let us open our hearts to him and ask him to help us to live out his mandate to go and do likewise. Who will you invite to come to RCIA this September? Which persons will you invite to learn more about the Catholic faith, or finally take the step of joining the Church? Will you undertake some personal study, to brush up on the faith yourself? Meditate upon the crucifix, and see that Christ’s death was not a random act of kindness, but had a very specific purpose: to draw all people into his life, which we receive through the sacraments of his Church.