

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)
(Deuteronomy 3:10-14 / Luke 10:25-37)
14.07.2019

Dear brothers and sisters,

In today's gospel passage, have you noticed the lawyer's question to Jesus: "**Who is my neighbour?**" Jesus has just told the man: "if you want to inherit eternal life, you must love the Lord your God... and your neighbour as yourself." Immediately the man asks Jesus: "Who is my neighbour?" The parable of the Good Samaritan is Jesus' answer to the lawyer's question.

This man wants a definition of the word "neighbour". He wants a list or a description of the people he must love. He thinks that if, by his good actions, he succeeds to love all the persons whose names are on this list, then he will be OK with God and will be rewarded with eternal life. But is it possible to be OK with God? Is it possible to buy eternal life from God by our good actions? Eternal life is a gift that we have to receive from God. We cannot buy it, even with our good actions. God's gift comes first. Our good actions are only a response to God's gift.

If we are honest, we have to confess that we too would love to be able to pose the question: "who is my neighbour?" Not only do we want to know who we must love, but we want to be authorized, encouraged and even justified not to love certain people. If only Jesus would say to us that our enemies or those whom it is not easy for us to love for one reason or another are not our neighbours! We like situations that are clear cut, black and white. We like to know what to do and what not to do. We like a road map. If we follow it scrupulously, then we think that we shall be saved. With the parable of the Good Samaritan, we discover that the answer to the question is not outside ourselves, written somewhere on a list, a program, a leaflet or a moral code to be followed scrupulously. No, the answer is within ourselves, in our hearts. Let me explain.

The priest and the Levite had surely good reasons not to stop and help the half-dead man lying on the roadside. Perhaps they had a busy schedule and were already running late. Certainly they did not want to become impure by touching a dead body. The Samaritan too had good reasons not to stop: It is well-known that Samaritans had no time for Jews and vice-versa. But the point is that the Samaritan stopped. Why? The Samaritan did not stop because some law or regulation required this of him. He stopped simply because his heart dictated to do so. His conscience told him this was the right thing to do. He stopped because something happened within him, at the level of his heart. We read in the gospel that "**he was moved with compassion** when he saw the half dead man on the roadside".

The teaching of the parable is clear. The answer to the question "Who is my neighbour?" is not written in a code of behaviour to which we have to adhere, something outside ourselves; the answer is written in our heart. The answer to the question 'Who is my neighbour?' is motivated by our compassion, the quality of our heart's sensitivity to the sufferings of others. Etymologically, to be compassionate is 'to suffer with' those who suffer. Our neighbour is all those who are in need and cross our path and whom we decide to help, serve, and love. There are

no conditions and no restrictions in the answer to the question ‘Who is my neighbour?’ The answer is as large as the compassion in our heart!

In another gospel passage (Mt 5:43-48), Jesus said to his disciples: “You have learnt how it was said: “You must love your neighbour and hate your enemy.” Here, we could think that we have found a satisfying answer to our question: Who is my neighbour? We have to love those who love us, those who think like us, our friends, while those who are our enemies are not our neighbour, and so we do not have to love these. But immediately Jesus adds: “It was said to you to love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I say to you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you; in this way you will be children of your Father in heaven, for he causes his sun to rise on bad men as well as good, and his rain to fall on honest and dishonest men alike”.

In this gospel passage, the answer to the question: “who is my neighbour?” is clear: everybody is my neighbour, all people without exception. The reason is simple: Every human being was created out of love by their heavenly Father. They are God’s children, and therefore our brothers and sisters. We are all called to live as brothers and sisters should, loving, respecting and serving one another. Yes, every human being is our neighbour. All those who cross our path in life are our neighbours, especially those in need of any kind.

God is compassion. God’s heart is full of compassion for all those he created out of love. When they suffer, God suffers with them. Since we were created in the image and likeness of God, we are invited to be as compassionate towards all our brothers and sisters in humanity as God is with us. We are called to be as compassionate as our Heavenly Father is compassionate. We are called to be perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect. It has rightly been said: ‘God’s perfection is a compassionate perfection’.

Who is my neighbour? Who is our neighbour? Everybody! The members of our family or community are our neighbours. Our friends are our neighbours. The members of *our* Christian community, of *all* Christian communities, Christians of other denominations also, are our neighbours. The members of other religions and also those who have no religion are our neighbours. We should consider every human being as our neighbour simply because their path crosses ours, especially if they are in any kind of need.

If God is compassion, it is not surprising that compassion is at the core of all the great religions: Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, etc... Jesus was a man of compassion. He looked at everybody and everything with compassion. We see that in each page of the gospels. Muslims refer to God as “The Compassionate, the Merciful”. Jews call God ‘the Compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness’. Compassion is at the core of the Dalai Lama’s teaching. It is so true that God is compassion, it is so true that compassion is at the heart of all the great religions, that if religious people don’t preach or live compassion, they don’t yet know God, they are still in need of conversion.

Lord, give us a heart as compassionate as your own, a heart able to love our neighbours, whoever and whatever they may be.