

11th July 2010
15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

The Word

Who is my neighbour?

Lk 10:25-37

The story of the Good Samaritan is probably the best known of Jesus' parables. Yet, regrettably, its message is not so well understood as to be always put into practice - even by Christians.

"Who is my neighbour?" "Who belongs to the community of God?" These are the underlying questions in today's Gospel. Jesus' answer is contained in the parable of the Good Samaritan. The parable tells the story of a man in distress. Two religious people - a priest and a Levite - pass him by. They probably did so with the best of religious intentions. Had they touched a corpse, they would, according to the Law, have become ritually unclean, and would have been unable to perform their religious duties. For them, religious purity ranked higher than compassion. So they pass the man by.

Along comes a Samaritan, someone considered by the Jews to be unholy and outside of God's love. He is moved by compassion to attend to the man in distress. By his compassionate actions, he proves to be the man's neighbour. He shows himself to be closer to God than the two good Jews who left the injured man by the side of the road.

The message of the parable is that anyone who acts as God acts, anyone who acts with compassion, is my neighbour and belongs to God's community. The keys to belonging to God are compassion and mercy.

Reflect

In the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus tells us very strongly that if we are to belong to him we must treat all those who need it with compassion and mercy.

Indeed, given the clarity of Jesus' teaching, one would expect compassion and mercy to be the distinguishing characteristics of every Christian. Unfortunately, they are not. The Jewish people of Jesus' time were not the only ones to neglect this teaching. Modern Christians neglect it too. Ask a Traveller, a refugee, a homeless person or any other excluded member of our society and they will tell you that they are not always received with the compassion and help that the Gospel demands.

In Shakespeare's play *The Merchant of Venice*, Shylock, the Jew, asks the question why a Christian can mock him and exclude him. He protests that Jews are not too different from Christians: "Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? Fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons? Subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is?"

That is the message today's Gospel hammers home to all of us. It is about being a neighbour to all without exclusion. It reminds us that if we do not love and care for our neighbour, irrespective of who that person is, then we cannot claim to be truly Christian.

Say

“Lord, help me to treat everybody as I would like to be treated, with gentleness and compassion.”

Pray

Pray for people everywhere, especially those on the margins, those who feel isolated and ignored, and feel as if they are nobody’s neighbour. Ask the Lord to help you to see everybody with God’s eyes.

Do

Be gentle and patient with someone who makes demands on your time.

Be conscious of those who are in need of help or a kind word.

Give to a charity that helps the homeless or victims of crime.

Learn

* The Christian treats every person as his or her neighbour.

* Everybody is the same in God’s eyes.

* Our actions show the kind of people we are.