

# *Our Lady of Lourdes*

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 11, 2010

Readings:

Deuteronomy 30:10-14

Colossians 1:15-20

Luke 10:25-37

Deacon Bob

In today's Gospel we hear the familiar story of the Good Samaritan. This story is only found in the Gospel of Luke. Before we look at the Gospel let's look at our first reading from the Book of Deuteronomy. Moses asks the people to keep God's commandments and statutes that are written in the book of the law. He goes on to tell them that the command is not mysterious but already in your hearts. Being close to God is a part of who we are, it a part of our DNA.

God has made his covenant with his people from the earliest times. That covenant has changed over time. The covenant with Adam and Eve was represented by the tree in the middle of the garden. The tree of "the knowledge of good and evil" that they were not to eat. The covenant with Noah after the flood was the rainbow. The covenant with the Jewish people was the Law. The law was the way they were connected to God. The law was not for them a burden but a privilege. When Jesus came he changed the covenant once and for all. Remember he said "I came not to abolish the law but to fulfill it." The covenant with Jesus was not a sign or the law but a way of life; it is about a personal relationship with God.

This leads us to the gospel story of the Good Samaritan. The Scholar who tried to test Jesus knew the law. He answered by drawing on two scripture passages. "You shall love the Lord your God with your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" from the Book of Deuteronomy. From the Book of Leviticus "you shall love your neighbor as yourself." The passage from Deuteronomy is part of the Shema which the Jewish people recite twice a day, morning and evening so it was easy for the lawyer to answer in this way. Jesus affirms his answer and tells him "Do this and you will live." Knowing the law can be a mental exercise but living it is all together a different matter.

Perhaps for this reason the scholar of the law wanted to know more about who is his neighbor. Asking this question maybe was a way for him to find out who was not his neighbor. Was he looking for a loophole, do we do this. Jesus' parable did not give him or us any wiggle room.

The parable of the Good Samaritan presents three philosophies of life concerning our relationship with our neighbor. First the philosophy of the thieves who robbed the Samaritan was "what is yours is mine; I will take it by force. This was certainly common on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho and it is also common in our world today where the rights of others, their human dignity are trampled on.

The second philosophy is that of the Jewish priest and Levite, "What is mine is mine, I won't part with it." The priest and the Levite were prominent people who made lame excuses for not helping. We should not however be too critical of the priest and the Levite. We too have our excuses for not helping to pass on the other side, some valid and others not. We too have urgent duties that will not permit delay. We too may not want to get dirty. We too may be afraid of stopping on the road to help a stranger. We too may be overwhelmed with the logistics of helping so many needy people. There are real concerns and we must acknowledge them.

The third philosophy is that of the Samaritan, “what is mine is yours, I will share it with you.” This is certainly not a worldly philosophy where many may feel that I have worked hard for what I have why can’t you do the same. There is great risk in being a good Samaritan.

This story about an old man on a crowded bus speaks to the perceived risk. A young man next to the older man asked him, ‘what time is it?’ The old man did not answer. The young man moved on. The old man’s friend sensing something was wrong asked “why were you so discourteous to the young man asking for the time?” The old man answered, “If I had given him the time of day, next he would want to know where I am going. Then we might talk about our interest. If we did that he might invite himself to my house for dinner. If he did that he would meet my lovely daughter. If he met her, they would fall in love. I don’t want my daughter marrying someone who can’t afford a watch.” This story may be humorous and exaggerated but we can find many reasons for not taking the risk of being involved in helping.

In a world where we have needy neighbors in every direction how do we keep from becoming numb to the need, to exhaustion of our concern? The actions of the Samaritan give us a pattern to follow. First we must see the needy person. We must see them as a fellow human being. We can not dismiss them or rationalize his or her sufferings. This is not easy as we see so much suffering that we become immune to it all.

Second if we truly see the needy then we will be moved to pity. We will feel this in our gut. We can not do this often as we lack the capacity to fix all the needs of the entire planet. We can not help everyone, but we can help someone.

The third thing the Samaritan did was to take action. We can and should do what we can to help. We can put our resources to use recognizing that we may have more to offer than we realize. We just may be the right person, at the right place, at the right time. We may be an agent of Divine compassion. Could there be a better role for any of us to play?

I recently read a letter in an animal rescue magazine that my wife receives. The author was quoting Henry David Thoreau, one of our country’s greatest philosopher writers. Thoreau wrote “that many are slaves to their work and go to their graves with a song still in their heart.” The author said he had found a solution to his anxiety over what Thoreau would have called “quiet desperation.” He says he has found that rescuing animals gives him a great fulfillment. He goes on to say that they do not satisfy our dreams of fame or fortune; they do not give us what we thought we wanted. The rewards from helping animals when we save their lives transcend our hopes, they heal us.

If helping animals can do this and it can what more will be done when we help our fellow human beings. It completes us. Our readings today tell us everything we really need to know. First God is always with us, we must never forget this. Second we are to love God with everything in us. Finally we are to love our neighbor, who is everyone, as we love ourselves. Jesus tells us as he did the scholar of the law, “Go and do likewise.”