



WEEKLY GOSPEL REFLECTION



15th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle C

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"Go and do likewise." Luke 10:37

Today's gospel presents us with one of the most famous parables of Jesus. The familiarity of the story makes it hard for us to hear it as Jesus' first hearers did. Like all parables, it is intended to disturb the hearers' understanding of life, and it does this in at least three ways.

The first way is by simply including a Samaritan in the story. As Jesus speaks of those who passed by the beaten man, he begins with a temple priest and then moves to a Levite, an assistant at the temple. When neither of those reached out to the victim, the listeners would have expected the next passer-by to be a Jewish layman, just as we would expect to hear about a lay person if someone told a story about a bishop and then a priest. Instead, Jesus shocks his audience by making the next figure a Samaritan. The Jews considered Samaritans heretics for intermarrying with pagans. It may be easier to grasp the depth of enmity between these two groups if we were to imagine Jesus telling the story today and making the hero an Arab Muslim.

By using this story, Jesus reverses the lawyer's question about his neighbor. The question flows from the Jewish teaching that one had obligations to those who were part of the chosen people, i.e. the neighbor. The real issue, Jesus insists, is not who the neighbor is but what it means to be a neighbor. We are obliged to be a neighbor to everyone, not just to those in our group.

The conclusion of the story also makes it clear that the Samaritan, who would not have been included in the normal definition of neighbor, nonetheless acted as a neighbor. It is the action of true compassion toward a wounded person that very much matters. Jesus' implication is that mercy flows regardless of whether the wounded soul belongs to the right group or nation. This fits well with Luke's frequent emphasis on the universal scope of the gospel message. Any person, Jew or non-Jew, can be saved. Those who have received the gift of salvation and divine flow are called to live as neighbors to all people. *"Do this and you will live."*

What is the spiritual impact of this parable? Let's consider for a moment the culture of scarcity where we are ruled both by fear of never having enough, and fear of approaching the "unclean." In this dualistic mindset we will always avoid the encounter with the mentally or physically diminished among us. How often does our conscience bother us as we avoid that beggar on our street corners, as the Levite did. But as we take a moment to turn our hearts toward the mercy of Jesus, he transforms our being into a spirituality of abundance. Our Lord gives us all good gifts, as the Holy Spirit illuminates us with the discernment to share these gifts, even in small ways, with the mentally and physically less fortunate cast out to our "street corners."

Reflect on this parable in a way that clearly brings to light its shocking nature, relating it to your life. As you reread the Gospel Using Ignatian Holy Imagination, emphasize in your mind those words and phrases that make this story come alive in your own time. If not you, then who will show mercy?

Reflect on what Jesus said to the lawyer, *"Go and do likewise."*

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke

A lawyer stood up to test Jesus.

"Teacher," he said,
"what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Jesus said to him,
"What is written in the law?
What do you read there?"

The lawyer answered,
"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
and with all your soul, and with all your strength,
and with all your mind;
and your neighbor as yourself."

And Jesus said to him,
"You have given the right answer;
do this, and you will live."

But wanting to justify himself, the lawyer asked Jesus,
"And who is my neighbor?"

Jesus replied,
"A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho,
and fell into the hands of robbers,
who stripped him, beat him, and went away,
leaving him half dead.
Now by chance a priest was going down that road;
and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.
So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.
But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him,
he was moved with pity.
He went to him and bandaged his wounds,
having poured oil and wine on them.
Then he put him on his own animal,
brought him to an inn, and took care of him.
The next day the Samaritan took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said,
'Take care of him;
and when I come back,
I will repay you whatever more you spend.'"

Jesus asked,
"Which of these three, do you think,
was a neighbor to the man
who fell into the hands of the robbers?"

The lawyer said, "The one who showed him mercy."

Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

The Gospel of the Lord