

COMPASSION FOR ALL (Lk 10:25-37)

"So, who is my neighbor?" It's almost as though the scholar of the law is also saying, "surely not those hated Samaritans." The Parable of the Good Samaritan is so familiar to many of us that we may let it kind of wash over us without experiencing the deep call which lies within it. Jesus told this parable while he was on his way from Galilee to Jerusalem with his disciples, and they had to pass through Samaria. But the Samaritans did not want to let them go through their territory because of the animosity and hatred between them and the Jews. Their regard for one another was similar to the way in which the Jews and Palestinians today think of each another. So James and John told Jesus to call down fire from heaven to destroy the Samaritan people. Apparently, three years of living with Jesus and being taught by him were not enough to give them compassion and understanding. In that context we come to today's gospel reading where Jesus intentionally uses a Samaritan to show compassion, in order, not only to make his point to the scribe, but also to further teach his own disciples how they are to treat others.

With that as a background we turn to the scene in today's gospel. The scholar of the law was a very devout Jew. He was a very learned man, intimately familiar with every aspect of the Jewish law, even to crossing every "t" and dotting every "i". When one is immersed in law, one may get very scrupulous about the precise wording and definition of terms. Sometimes when someone is that deep in the forest, they can lose sight of what the real purpose of the law is. Thus, we have the situation where the scholar in encountering Jesus tries to get a **precise** definition of who it is that he is to love, maybe in a certain sense to get some clarification about who is it okay **not** to love. "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus' reply doesn't **narrow** the scope for him but broadens the definition **so wide** as to encompass everyone, even those whom he regarded as his **enemy**. That was not exactly what the scholar was hoping to hear. The priest and the Levite were following the law. But they didn't see the world through the eyes of God as Jesus did. When Jesus asks the scholar which of the three was neighbor to the one in need, he is thrown off-kilter so much because his hatred is so strong that he cannot even bring himself to say the word "Samaritan" but rather says "the one who showed compassion." And in that way Jesus helps us to see as he does: **that** is what **you** are to do. "Go and learn the meaning of the words, it is mercy that I desire, not sacrifice."

All of that may be interesting "stuff" but we have to apply it to ourselves today in our own world in order for the message to truly have meaning. A hot topic of discussion these days seems to be the issue of illegal immigration: what do we do with those millions of people who are living in this country **illegally**, outside the law? There is a lot of strong emotions and heated arguments that are being vented in all the discussions. But I haven't heard much about mercy and

compassion in any of the debates. If we simply look at the subject of illegal immigration from the standpoint of branding the individuals as law breakers, as anonymous, faceless nobodies, it is easy to think of them as less than human. If, however, we come to know them as individuals with a name, with a face, with a story, then maybe we will see them as God does. The Holy Family, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, were strangers in a foreign land when they fled to Egypt to escape Herod. They were in a foreign environment, without family or friends, looking for work wherever they could find it to scrape out a living, knowing that anything is better than nothing. We call them "illegals" branding them as criminals, and thus lumping them into the same category as people who have done heinous crimes, like murder and rape and assault and battery. In fact, these very same people whom we are led to think of as criminals may be more holy than many of us. They may be our house keeper, our gardener, the persons who make our produce in the supermarkets available to us throughout the year. They take the menial jobs because we don't want to do them. And we know these people --- their names may be Jose and Carlos and Maria and Laura, and even Ivan. In 1994 a 16-year-old boy snuck across the Mexican/US border with his 4-year-old brother, crossing the desert at night, risking his life to join his mother and father in this country. Today that 16-year-old boy is a 32-year-old priest serving **us**. We have come to know him as a kind and caring, humble, holy, joyful person, and we call him "our own" --- Fr. Ivan Hernandez. We are called to approach all issues of life with the same compassion which the Good Samaritan showed, even the political issues of today. Illegal immigrants are not our enemies; they are our brothers and sisters. We are called to see others as God sees them.

Compassion --- some of us may act as though we are afraid to be compassionate, as though compassion may make too many demands on us, ask too much of us. We can sometimes be too focused on our own selves rather than think of the other who may be in more desperate need. I once was the campaign manager for the local branch of my company in the only charitable giving campaign allowed in the company. A presentation was given to all employees in which a video was shown depicting some of the needs towards which their contributions would go, showing real people in really difficult life situations. I noticed that in certain cases less than half of some departments' employees were present at the showing of the video. So I asked some of them why they had chosen not to come. The response was that they had no problems giving, but they did not want to watch the video because it tugged on peoples' heartstrings and was too emotional. Another way of putting it would be to say that they were afraid of what compassion would lead them to do to help the more needy in our community.

Compassion --- that is the feeling which we hear is **most** attributed to Jesus in his ministry. Those are the eyes through which he looked upon the world. Several times we hear that he had compassion on the people for they were like sheep without a shepherd; he looked with compassion on the lepers, on the

sick, on those with demons. And compassion is what he told the scholar of the law, and thus is telling us, that he, and we, must **do** in order to gain eternal life. Keeping laws is good for the right order of society. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to go beyond merely keeping laws for the sake of the law and to show compassion to those who need our help. We count on the mercy and compassion of God to forgive us, to help us in our time of need, and we are to do the same for others.

I don't have the answer or the solution to the issue of illegal immigration or to any of today's political or legal problems. But in the midst of any discussion about those issues, we are called to live our lives in compassion, dying to ourselves in order that others may have life.

Who knows, one of those we help may turn out to be a priest or at least one of the favored children of God, who looks on the poor with a special love and tenderness. May **we** see with the eyes of Jesus.

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