

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Homily Given by Fr. Gabriel Scasino, OFM Conv.

July 10, 2016

(Deuteronomy 30: 10-14); (Colossians 1: 15-20); (Luke 10: 25-37)

Today's Gospel story reminds me of my years of teaching teenage boys. Not unlike the scholar in the Gospel, teenagers seem to already know everything and yet, they want to know what they have to do to "get by" – usually seeking to do the minimum in order to pass the class. The scholar, who already knows the answer very well, asks Jesus what one must do in order to inherit eternal life. The scholar, being well versed in the law, knows the answer rather well. And again, typical to many adolescents, nit-picks and wants a description of "who is my neighbor". Here's where the twist comes. The scholar knew as the law dictates, that a neighbor is any other fellow Jew, period...certainly not a gentile and definitely not a Samaritan.

So, in order to gain eternal life, one needs to love God and to love one's neighbor as one's self. I'm tempted to further explore what "love of self" means here, but I'm afraid we'd miss the point of the Gospel story otherwise. However, I do think it is important to note, that "love of self" doesn't mean buying myself the most expensive clothing or jewelry. It means seeing myself as God sees me, and being willing to cooperate with God's grace in order to be more like Him.

Lest we get too off-topic, we need to pay attention to how Jesus develops for us the meaning of loving God and others. In this poignant story, Jesus does not illustrate love as nice and warm sentiments we have for others. As nice as that is, that's not what identifies us as Christians and certainly not what gets us into Heaven. Remember from a few weeks ago that discipleship is costly; it is painful; it requires self-denial, hard work and suffering. Indeed today's story illustrates that again.

There are a few nuances we modern-day hearers may miss. First, we know that this story takes place in Jewish territory. This is important because Jews and Samaritans hated each other. Furthermore, there would be no good reason for a Samaritan to even be in the area, much less helping a Jew (if that's who the beaten-up man was). In fact, the Samaritan was risking his own life by helping the beat-up man. Not only was the Samaritan's mere presence inflammatory, but his using his own oils and wine to help cure the bruised and beaten man would have rendered the man unclean. So even if the man were healed, would he want to retaliate for now being made unclean? What if the man finally became better and wanted to kill him? What if other Jews were aware of the Samaritan's presence? What if the Samaritan's own people knew of his mercy and compassion toward a Jew? Would he be ostracized and ran out by his own people?

The Samaritan risked so much, but why? Because he was moved to treat the beat-up man with mercy. Ultimately, Jesus is suggesting that the Samaritan man acted like God-merciful. We are called to do the same. We need to ask ourselves, personally and communally, who are those among us we don't like or have strong negative feelings for?

Are they people of a different race or culture?

Of a different sexual orientation?

Are they poor or rich?

Are they addicted to drugs or alcohol?

Perhaps immigrants or refugees?

Are they non-Catholics, Muslims, or those of no particular faith?

Are they Democrats or Republicans?

Could it be my own brother, sister, mother or father, or could it even be myself whom I harbor such strong feelings toward?

Often our words, attitudes, and behaviors towards others leave them naked, bruised, and beaten and we don't even realize it or don't care. We can't be like the priest or the Levite; instead, we are called to that which costs; to that which is demanding – to be merciful and to ultimately put others first.

The Pope recently reminded us that *“People who go through life without taking notice of the great spiritual and material needs of others are people who are not fully alive or aware of what it means to serve others.”* He says, *“Remember this well: A life not lived for others is not a life.”* Jesus is showing us that we aren't called to simply feel sorry for people or to wish them nice feelings. He is telling us that we must act; we have to respond.

Just like the Samaritan who risked so much, we have to be willing to love by our service. We have to be willing to approach the other, pour oil and wine over their wounds and bandage them with acts of love. And yet, there are times we too find ourselves naked, beaten and bruised. In those moments, we have to learn to accept the mercy that maybe even our worst enemy is willing to offer us. May this Eucharist – a memorial of God's very mercy for us – be a reminder to each one of us to extend and to accept acts of mercy, today and always.