

Why does Jesus tell us this story of the Good Samaritan? A little background is necessary. Jews considered the Samaritans impure and ungodly people, unworthy of mercy or salvation. So, the story that Jesus tells is shocking and probably very offensive to the audience. Jesus is preaching to Jews, and the roles of Priest and Levites are respected professions among the Jews of the First Century: they serve in the Temple. The priests were members of a professional and trained clergy, people consecrated to God. The Levites were laypeople, volunteers who assist the priests in their ministries.

Both Priests and Levites have strong reasons to avoid giving aid to someone on the way from Jerusalem to Jericho. There are many dangerous criminals stealing money or even stealing the clothes of the walkers. The expression "A half-dead man," means a dead body. According to the regulations of purification, even if the shadow of a person is in contact with a dead body the person becomes immediately impure. So, for a Priest or a Levite serving in the Temple area, being impure was a great obstacle for their ministry. This is a very important reason, not to justify the indifference of these two men, but to understand why they passed by the other side of the road. Also, a dead body can be used by robbers to attract a victim. So, the Priest and the Levite are not bad individuals at all. They simply act with good common sense, protecting themselves for being considered impure for their ministry and from a dangerous position to be robbed and killed.

So, all of this makes the action of the Samaritan, all the more remarkable. His actions are not really expected. The Samaritan man takes great risks, endures great costs, and goes to great effort to help this stranger. What is interesting about the story, is that the caring man is a Samaritan, a person who most Jewish people racially profiled as rude, unclean, untrustworthy, and ungodly. If Jesus told this story today to us, who would play the role of this compassionate hero? A person who struggles with sexual orientation? A poor person? An undocumented immigrant? Or a person drawn from whatever race, class, profession, or religion that is most difficult for us?

When it is about the dignity of a person, Jesus becomes very challenging for us. This story raises this question: Do we want to stay antiseptically uninvolved with others who suffer, or do we want to embrace the compassion of Christ? We can create a thousand excuses to not help the poor, excuses like: They made poor choices... They don't look friendly... We all had the same opportunities... They don't belong to our society.... In the dialogue with the scholar of the Law, Jesus does not try to challenge or change the scribe's beliefs or knowledge of scripture. But Jesus turns the question of "Who is my neighbor?" into "Who can I be a neighbor to?"

Dear brothers and sisters,

As long as we divide the world into neat categories of neighbors and strangers, citizens and undocumented people, people who deserve our help and those who don't, our love will always be selective, and we will only be generous to those who are easy to love. But if we draw the world so that everyone, everywhere, IS OUR NEIGHBOR, as Jesus invites us to do in this story, our narrow view and selective love will be challenged. The good Samaritan stops, taking huge risks, lifting the wounded man up on his own animal, taking him to an inn and caring for him. It is not enough just to believe that we should love the entire world. There is also something to do. It is risky work. And we may get dirty and tired - and hurt --in the process. But love is always worth the risk. A student once asked anthropologist Margaret Mead what she considered to be the first sign of civilization in a

society. Mead could have mentioned the first signs of tools, like grinding stones or clay pots for holding food and water. She could have mentioned art, like cave paintings or carved statues. Instead, Mead said the first sign of civilization in her opinion was when an ancient skeleton was found with a healed thighbone. Why? It was Mead's estimation that in a competitive, primitive culture where people had to hunt and escape predators in order to survive each day, the fact that someone set aside their own work in order to care for another's injury was a sign of civilization. As Mead explained, "A broken femur that is healed is evidence that someone has taken time to stay with the one who fell, has bound up the wound, has carried the person to safety and has tended the person through recovery. Helping someone else through difficulty is where civilization starts." It's also where Christianity starts.

We can help in healing the many broken femurs in our world. Or we can fail God by simply doing nothing, risking nothing, in the face of human need. We may have some clear ideas about our faith: Until the world believes we care, they don't care what we believe. So, as Jesus said, "Go - and do likewise."

Who is my neighbor today?

View "[The Good Samaritan](#)" 1537 painting @Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

The Universal Prayer
Sunday 13th July 2025
15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Sisters and brothers,
in each generation we seek to understand more fully the question asked of Jesus and his answer,
"Who is my neighbor?"

1. For Pope Leo, that he may be refreshed during his vacation after two demanding months since his election.
We pray to the Lord.
2. For each other, that we will have the courage to recognize that our neighbor is everyone in need, and so with deep justice and charity come to their aid in whatever way that is possible.
We pray to the Lord.
3. 4. For those trapped in war in Palestine and in Ukraine, cruelly treated and denied their freedom, that nations and people of goodwill will seek to bring them into peace and safety.
We pray to the Lord.
5. 5. For farmers throughout the world, experiencing the devastating effects of climate change, that they will receive the urgent aid they need from governments.
We pray to the Lord.
6. 7. For our brothers and sisters in Texas, who experience the terrible floods of last week: may they receive the aid and care they need with urgency.
We pray to the Lord.
8. 8. For our deceased relatives, friends, and parishioners and for the people who died in the floods in Texas, that they will feast at the heavenly banquet.
We pray to the Lord.

Celebrant:

Father, your Law, given to us through Jesus, directs us to a universal love which has a particular focus on those treated badly by others and all in need. Give us hearts of generosity to come to their aid. Through Christ our Lord.