

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (Year C)
7-13-2025 Homily

I. Introduction

In his book *Strength to Love*, Martin Luther King, the father of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., wrote about a distressing incident that occurred down South in the 1950s. A car carrying several young black basketball players was in an accident, and three of the young men were severely injured. One of the others immediately called an ambulance, but when it arrived, the ambulance driver, who was white, stated without shame or apology that it was not his policy to help Negroes, and he drove off. A passing automobile did stop, and the driver—a white man—graciously offered to take the injured men to the nearest hospital. When they arrived there, however, the doctor on duty belligerently announced, “This hospital is for white folk only; take these boys to the hospital for colored people.” That hospital was fifty miles away, and by the time the driver got them there, it was too late: one of the players was already dead, and the other two men died shortly after this. Commenting on this, Martin Luther King wrote, “Probably all three could have been saved if they had been given immediate treatment. This happened in the Bible belt where those involved would no doubt say they were church-attending Christians” (Duncan, *Lively Illustrations for Preaching*, p. 63).

This is a very sad story, but the good news is that, first, there was one person—a white man—who really understood what it was to be a Christian, and second, that America has changed greatly over the past seventy years. In many ways our society’s moral standards have declined drastically during our lifetimes, but in the areas of racial harmony and justice, even though we’ve got a long way to go, we’ve made amazing progress, which I’m sure is pleasing to God, and this sort of incident probably wouldn’t happen today. In terms of our personal morality, however, we can never sit back and congratulate ourselves and remain content with the status quo; we must always try to grow closer to God—and an essential part of this process is learning to see and respond to Christ’s presence in those in need.

II. Development

Because, as St. Paul tells us, Jesus is the firstborn of all creation and the head of the Church, He is entitled to set the membership requirements for His Kingdom—and this is exactly what He does in today’s Gospel. Our Lord emphasizes that to be Christians, we must love God and other people—not only in words, but also in deeds. There’s nothing mysterious or hard to understand about this teaching; as Moses says in the 1st Reading, God’s law is not too remote or abstract for us to discover and apply to daily life. It’s very practical and down-to-earth. As even one of Jesus’s opponents admitted to Him, we are called to love God with all our hearts, all our minds, and all our strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves; our Savior promises that if we do this, we shall have eternal life. This is an easy concept; the difficult part of the equation is deciding whom we will identify and accept as our neighbor. Our human tendency is to limit this term only to people we know, or who are like us, or with we’re comfortable, and to exclude everyone else—the way most of the people in the story responded to the injured basketball players. Our Lord rejects this understanding, and tells us very unmistakably that our neighbor is anyone in need of our assistance. The temple priest and the levite in Our Lord’s parable probably thought they had very good excuses for passing by the

injured man, but in doing so, they failed in their duty—not only toward him, but also toward God. Only the Samaritan, a person regarded as an outcast by the Jews, showed compassion; his religious faith was backed up by actions. Jesus' purpose in telling this story wasn't to shame His Jewish listeners, but to give them an example, for as He said to the scholar of the law, "Go and do likewise."

III. Conclusion

I believe one of the effects of original sin is that we tend to be self-centered and caught up in our own little world. Many times it's not a case of us deliberately rejecting others or spurning the opportunity to help them in their need; it's just that we automatically consider only our own needs and desires, and don't even notice the people around us who are hurting—unless something happens to bring them to our attention, or unless we make a special effort to look. Today Jesus is asking us to make that special effort, to be alert to any opportunities we may be given to reach out to others in a compassionate way.

We've all had the experience of failing to respond to someone else's suffering, and later thinking, "I should have done something," or "I wish I hadn't just walked away." The Lord doesn't want us to remain forever guilty over such failures, but He does want us to learn from them. Sometime this week you and I will encounter a person who's lonely or depressed or worried, someone who's frightened or confused or hurting, someone who's grieving or upset or struggling with a major problem. That person may be someone personally known to us, or a complete stranger; someone we're attracted to, or a person we'd normally have nothing to do with; someone who seems to be like us in a lot of ways, or someone with whom we seem to have almost nothing in common. Jesus says that when this person comes into our life, he or she is our neighbor—and the Lord calls us to act accordingly, following the example of the Samaritan in His parable, and following the example of the white passerby in Martin Luther King's story.

When we meet Jesus on the day we die, He will judge us not primarily on how much we've done, but on how much we've loved. True love isn't something abstract or ethereal; it's very practical and down-to-earth. Let us turn to the Lord and humbly admit the times we've failed to practice it, and let us confidently ask for His grace, that we may live in this spirit of love each and every day of our lives.