

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, July 13, 2025

There are a lot of people who move to this area with the explicit intention of getting away from having neighbors. There's nothing wrong with enjoying solitude. Peace and quiet is "A-okay." You know we don't have to always be caught up in a flurry of activity with a bunch of other people. But if the attitude is "I just don't want to have to deal with other people," it is not very compatible with being a Christian. And we have to guard against that kind of movement of the heart. For the Commandment is to love our neighbor, not despise or avoid them, and love of neighbor is non-negotiable. It is not 'take or leave it,' or 'if you can, fit it in and that's great.' Love of neighbor is an indispensable part of the Christian life. Like the scholar of the Law in today's Gospel, Christians today are still asking themselves the question: "Who is my neighbor? For whom am I responsible? For whom am I supposed to care?"

We tend, I think, sometimes to sort of draw a circle in the ground around us, and properly speaking, keep the neighbors on the inside of that circle because everyone outside of the circle is not my problem. Or not my concern. So, I will take care of the people that are inside my circle, but the others, they are not welcome. It is interesting because people take a different approach to this separation. Some will say, "Well, inside of that circle of course are my family, my children, my brothers and sisters, my grandchildren, my parents, perhaps. Of course, I have the responsibility to take care of them; they are certainly my neighbor – I will associate with them and I don't mind associating with them. But I am not going to talk to that person banging on the street or who has the cardboard sign. I am not going to go out and associate with people that aren't close to me or who I don't know, a stranger. I am not responsible, I can't be responsible for everyone, after all. You can't be expected to

care for everyone in the world.” And then there are others who approach it this way. They say: “Well, I will be happy to send the check to Zimbabwe, send the check to Feed the Hungry. I will be happy to donate to a mission that is providing healthcare for those in can't afford it in Third World countries and all of that. But I am not going to talk to my brother-in-law! That guy, he crossed me one too many times. Or the woman across the street, or someone whose politics oppose mine. Or ‘fill in’ the blank.”

We tend to think of ‘neighbor’ as someone we have a particular affiliation with - family, coworker, a physical neighbor, someone who has common interests, even if we don't know them, they are ‘on our team’, so to speak. Maybe we think of the neighbor as someone who's easy to be around, someone we are comfortable with, someone who doesn't ask too much of us. But the parable in the Gospel today does not indicate that there was any prior connection for affiliation between the Samaritan and the robber's victim. They were strangers. They were strangers. And yet, the Samaritan cared. So, the Lord Jesus invites us to expand our circle. Maybe not to draw that circle quite so solidly or firmly in the ground around us. It has something to do with the way that we perceive other people.

Look at the way the Samaritan perceived the robber's victim. By the way, the robber's victim represents us. The robber's victim does not principally represent that someone we are called to serve. We are the robbers' victim. We are the ones who are broken, and wounded, and sinful, and poor, and weak, lying on the side of the road. And the good Samaritan is Jesus who comes to our help. Not because of our deserving it or earning it, but out of complete compassion and love for us. Jesus comes. He is the Samaritan. He yields and strengthens and saves us. So, He must look at us as being worth saving. And that's how we're invited to look at others.

The Commandment is: Love your neighbor as yourself. That does not mean love your neighbor the same amount, so to speak, as you love yourself. It is something deeper than that. It speaks of a certain kind of union that we have with other people. Certainly, we are united in the body of Christ – we are all baptized, we have a certain connection to one another. We belong to one another; we belong to the same body. But even beyond that, we belong to the human family. So, I look upon every other person then, as somehow, even if in a small way, I look upon every other person as an extension of myself. And so, when I encounter a neighbor, when I encounter another human being, I care for them as I would care for myself. We belong to each other. Even if we are total strangers, we belong to each other. We have responsibility for each other. That's a new way of looking at things, perhaps. But it seems to be the way that the Samaritan looks upon the robber's victim. The priest and the Levite see the robber's victim and cross to the other side: “Not my problem. I do not know that person. I better not get involved here.” But the Samaritan sees the wounded man and perhaps part of all of this is the recognition that we're not just supposed to look out and see who is my neighbor, but realize that other people are also looking to us and asking the question, “Is that my neighbor?” “Is that person going to treat me the way the good Samaritan treated the robber's victim?”

So today, we might ask for the grace to see everyone who crosses our path as a neighbor that we might have a greater sense of care and responsibility for each other, not pushing others away, ignoring others, but ask that God will soften the hardness of our hearts that we might follow the example of Jesus the Good Samaritan, and lay down our life for others, so that they may live.