

## 15<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME – C (July 10, 2022)

Once again we hear this parable of the good Samaritan, surely one of the most well-known of all of Jesus' teaching stories. The occasion: a scholar of the law of Moses wants to know what is necessary to come to eternal life. In response to Jesus' question, he correctly states that the law is all about loving God with one's whole being and loving one's neighbor as oneself. The scholar asks 'who is my neighbor?', and Jesus responds with this parable.

Two years ago, Pope Francis issued an encyclical titled "Fratelli Tutti" which means 'all brothers'. His purpose is to remind us what Jesus and our Christian faith teach us about the scope of our relationships with other people and our responsibilities toward them—what true fraternity and social friendship is all about. He devotes one chapter of this encyclical to a really thoughtful and challenging reflection on this 'good Samaritan' parable; I'd like to mention just a couple of highlights from this chapter for our own reflection.

The Holy Father reminds us of a very important feature of this parable: the victim of the robbers was a Jew as were the priest and the Levite—Jewish religious officials—who did nothing at all to help their fellow countryman and believer. The Samaritan who came along was the only one who saw the victim, had compassion on him, and actually did something to help him. This is remarkable because in Jesus' time, there was no love lost at all between Jew and Samaritan—the animosity between those two groups was bitter and long-lasting. So for Jesus—a faithful Jew himself-- to praise the care and compassion of this Samaritan had to be a real challenge to this scholar of the Jewish law to whom he was speaking. In other words, 'neighbor' doesn't mean only someone of your own acquaintance or who shares your faith or belief. "Neighbor", rather, is anyone in need—there is no one who is not our neighbor.

Back for a moment to those two individuals who did nothing for the victim—both were religious leaders, supposedly concerned about one's relationship with God. But they forgot the fact that God is very much concerned about what we do or don't do for those in need; that is very clear in both the Old and New Testaments. As the pope says, "belief in God and the worship of God are not enough to ensure that we are actually living in a way pleasing to God...an authentic openness to God, on the other hand, is a way of practicing the faith that helps open our hearts to our brothers and sisters."

Pope Francis also highlights another obvious and challenging element of this parable. After recalling those who saw the victim but just walked on by, he says "Only one person stopped...He also gave him something that in our frenetic world we cling to: he gave him his time." It's so easy to give in to the fallback position of: 'yes, that person is hurting and could use the personal touch, but I just don't have time—too many things on my 'to-do' list'. The Holy Father reminds us that this parable calls us to 'rediscover our vocation as citizens of our respective nations and of the entire world...we are called to direct society to the pursuit of the common good.' The Good Samaritan, he says, shows that 'the existence of each ...individual is deeply tied to that of others: life is not simply time that passes; life is a time for interactions.'

After all is said and done about the different characters in this parable—Jew and Samaritan, priest and innkeeper—Pope Francis gets to the heart of the matter: "Now there are only two

kinds of people; those who care for someone who is hurting and those who pass by; those who bend down to help and those who look the other way and hurry off.” It really does boil down to that, doesn’t it? Now, of course it is true that no one person can respond to all needs. We each have our own responsibilities, and we each have limited time and limited resources. But we cannot—we dare not—translate those realities into an overall mentality or practice of ‘it’s not my problem; I don’t want to get involved.’” A suggestion for you for the next time you see or become aware of a particular person or situation of need—whether a next-door or next-farm neighbor, someone asking for a few dollars at an intersection in Mason City, Rochester, or elsewhere, or yet another appeal for financial help that you get in the mail...instead of pretending you didn’t see the person or the need, notice the person, become aware of the need. And then pray: “Lord, is this someone or something I can help with..that I should help with—whether with my money, my time, or simply my caring presence and concern? Help me to know and do what you want of me for the sake of this person in need who is in fact my neighbor.”

One more thought from Pope Francis here: he says that this Good Samaritan parable is not about some abstract social lesson; rather, ‘it speaks to us of an essential and often forgotten aspect of our common humanity: we were created for a fulfillment that can only be found in love.’” Love here means making that gift of yourself to another specific person for that person’s sake. He calls us to be ‘challenged to emerge from our comfortable isolation and to be changed by our contact with human suffering. That is the meaning of dignity.’” Indeed it is. God help us all to protect and foster that dignity in everyone who he is calling us to love and to serve as our neighbor.