

15th Sunday per Annum - C
Deuteronomy 30:10-14;
Colossians 1:15-20;
Luke 10:25-27
Little Flower - 7/15/19

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today I want to update you on my health. Tomorrow (Monday) I will begin my radiation treatments. I will have 44 treatments Monday through Friday over 9 weeks. In almost all cases, there are side effects, from very mild to severe. In other words, at this time I cannot tell you how they will impact my ability to be present to you and to serve you. Please continue to pray for me.

In today's Gospel, we hear Luke's presentation of Jesus' two great commandments, love God first and love our neighbors as ourselves. However, Luke presents them with a different twist. Luke puts the commandments into the mouth of the lawyer rather than into the mouth of Jesus. The lawyer knew the commandments. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus explained his radical call to love our neighbor.

Whenever these readings appear, my homily tends to focus more on love of neighbor than love of God because of the parable of the Good Samaritan. From Old Testament times, it has been the temptation of religious people, churching people, to separate love of God from love of neighbor. When Jesus linked these two commandments together, he was insisting that love of God and love of neighbor are inseparable. We cannot love God if we do not love our neighbor.

The parable of the Good Samaritan is one of the most familiar and most loved parables. We know that the Jews looked down upon the Samaritans because they did not worship in Jerusalem. Likewise, the Samaritans hated the Jews. Yet it was the Samaritan, not the Jewish priest or Levite, who cared for the injured Jewish man and, therefore, fulfilled Jesus' command to love our neighbor as ourselves. In effect, it does not matter who we are or who our neighbors are. Jesus promises, "*Do this and you shall live.*"

The parable, however, has a more profound message. The lawyer asked Jesus, "*And who is my neighbor?*" After telling the parable, Jesus asked the lawyer, "*Which of these three was neighbor to the one who fell in with the robbers?*" Another translation reads, "*Which of these three **made** himself a neighbor to the man...*" That translation emphasizes the choice the Samaritan made. In other words, the lawyer was trying to limit who his neighbor was. He was trying to limit whom he had to love as much as he loved himself. Jesus, however, turned the question around and challenged the lawyer to expand his understanding of neighbor and to choose to make himself neighbor to others.

On a personal level, today's Gospel challenges us to look into our hearts. Do I love freely and generously, or do I always try to limit my love? Whom do I see as neighbors, all people or only a few people?

The challenge of today's Gospel is also a challenge to the Church as community. Are we going to be an inclusive or an exclusive community? Historically, the Church has chosen to be inclusive. At the first council, the Council of Jerusalem, the Church decided that it was to be a community for both Jews and Gentiles. When Gnosticism (the first heresy) arose, the Church decided it was not going to be an elitist community. When the barbarians invaded the Roman Empire, the Church decided that it was going to be a church of both the strongly committed and the less committed.

My brothers and sisters, in every age, the Church as a whole and the local church community must ask and answer the question what kind of community are we going to be. Are we going to be a community only or primarily of the spiritually mature, the profoundly religious, and the righteous, or are we going to be a community for all people, a community of saints and sinners? Are we going to welcome all among us as brothers and sisters in Christ, or are we going to welcome only people like ourselves, who believe, think, and act as we do? This is a question of the heart, the heart of the community.