

HOMILY ON THE 8TH SUNDAY OF LUKE

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Sunday, 10th of November 2019

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, One God. Amen.

Today we listened to the Holy Gospel of Saint Luke in which we hear the parable of the Good Samaritan.

But let us first start with the lawyer who was trying to put our Lord to the test. He asked Christ, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

Being a lawyer and a well-educated man, He was asking the right question. He was asking what he needed to know and what he needed to do before he came before the fearful judgment seat of Christ.

He did not ask, “What shall I believe?” He did not ask “What church should I go to?” He had asked the right question, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

This is an extremely important question, a question we should all be asking ourselves. To get the textbook answer to the lawyer’s question, Jesus asks him, “What is written in the law? How do you read?”

I hope that all of you know the answer as well. The answer the lawyer gave is the correct one, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.”

The lawyer gave the right answer and our Lord says so: “You have answered right; DO this, and you will live.”

Now the lawyer asks Christ, “And who is my neighbour?” The response of Christ our God is the parable of the Good Samaritan.

We should not forget that Jesus is speaking to a Jewish audience. He is using examples of fellow Jews behaving badly and uses one of the Jews enemies as the good example, a Samaritan.

The Samaritans and Jews were at enmity with one another based on religion. Jews considered Samaritans to be unclean and despicable. But the Samaritan knows that when performing works of mercy there is no distinction between men.

What was Jesus Christ doing here? He is trying to shame the Jews into listening to His message. And what does this message say: the Jews' understanding of the essence of all Holy Scripture has become superficial and unimportant.

But what is that essence! That essence is the total love for God and Neighbour, not just in words, but also in deeds!

All Jews knew the letter of the Law. They knew they had to give 10% of their income to the Temple. They also knew that they had to give another third of a tithe to the poor, which is another 3%.

But what our Lord and Saviour is really saying here is that if the Jews really understand the love of God as relationship, then their love for God and their compassion for the poor and needy must urge them to give more than what is stated in the Law.

I think that I can speak for all of us that we agree that we should love God and our neighbour.

But for most of us, our neighbour has become somebody who is quite distant from us. Even family members have become distant in some cases. And why is that?

Because; we have a new law in our lives: The law of "I" and "me". According to this law, those who are closest to us – those who gave us life, those who have been wounded by their many burdens or works, illnesses, and sorrows, and who have been wounded by us – can no longer count on us and will wait for our help in vain.

Yesterday's best friends will stop being our dearest friends as soon as they run into trouble or lose their ability to be useful to us in our pursuit of our own personal happiness.

This new law gives us the complete freedom to pronounce our opinions and verdicts on everything and everyone. And, as soon as we find out that those close friends and relatives are no longer worthy of our love, or if they do no longer agree with our opinions and verdicts, we just forget they ever existed.

We consider a friend a sinner, so he becomes unworthy of our love. A relative does not share our faith or convictions, so we push him away. And, loved ones have hit hard times, of course through their own doing, so they deserve punishment.

By judging others, we combine in ourselves both the feelings of the priest and the Levite, who although being God-fearing men, passed the man in distress, without paying him any attention.

And this is also what we do now, if we pass by our nearest and dearest, those who need our attention; those who ask for our help, and finally those who suffer in silence.

But let us not forget that according to the Gospel, every man is a neighbour. And that is irrespective of race, tribe or convictions.

To all of us a neighbour should not just be a like-minded person, a colleague or a fellow countryman. It is every man! Whether he is one of our own or a stranger.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, as in the whole Gospel, the boundaries between what we understand of who is near and who is far are completely removed.

For God, no one is far. For God, all men are near. We are all his precious creatures.

The friends we pushed away, the family we no longer get in touch with, the foreigner we do not like because our countries never liked them. They all need to be looked at in a different light. The light of today's Gospel.

Maybe we feel that we are incapable of loving them, but at least consider this: Did Christ not die on the Cross for them as well? Did our Lord not give his life for all of mankind?

They are all God's creatures, in His image and likeness. God became man so that man might become god-like. God-manhood is the basis of religious life and the basis of the life of the whole world.

God Himself is humane; that is why man too must be humane. In man's humaneness, his divine likeness is manifested.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan does not just limit itself in teaching us who we should consider as a good neighbour. It also tells us how we can become a good neighbour for every man or woman who needs mercy.

The Holy Fathers interpret the parable in a very instructive manner. According to them, the man going down from Jerusalem to Jericho is Adam, who in this case represents all mankind.

Adam and Eve, who we all know fell into sin, were banished from Paradise. They were banished from the "Heavenly Jerusalem", and had to live in the world, where they were forced to contend with all kinds of difficulties.

The thieves are a symbol of the demonic powers who were envious of the purity of those first people and pushed them onto the path of sin, depriving Adam and Eve of faithfulness to God's will and of life in Paradise.

The wounds are the consequences of sin, which make us spiritually weak. The priest and the Levite represent the law of the Old Testament, given by Moses and the priesthood of Aaron, which by themselves could not save man.

The Good Samaritan is Jesus Christ, Who gave us the New Testament and the grace of God (the oil and wine in the parable) for the healing of our infirmities.

The inn is the Church of God, where we find everything necessary for our recovery. The innkeeper is an image of the Church's pastors and teachers, whom God charged to care for the flock.

The departure of the Samaritan in the morning symbolizes the appearance of Christ after his Resurrection and His glorious Ascension. The two denarii, given to the innkeeper, are the Divine Revelation, given in Sacred Scripture and Tradition.

Finally, the Samaritan's promise to return to the inn for a final reckoning is a prophesy of the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, when to each man will be given according to his works.

Next Friday, we start the Fast of the Nativity, so maybe during this coming time of prayer, reflection and fasting, we should ask ourselves: "Is everything we do just for ourselves, are we too busy fulfilling our own personal wishes and desires.

Or shall we start looking at our neighbours and reach out to them and show them compassion and give them help. Let us love them as Jesus loves us."

Let us cherish the words of I John, chapter 4, verse 7: "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and everyone that loveth and is born of God, and knoweth God."

Amen.