

15th Sunday Ord. Time ©
St. Athanasius and St. Francis Parishes
July 9, 10, 2016

With the parable of the Good Samaritan as today's gospel text, there was really little choice about whether or not to address it in the homily this weekend. It is a classic Scripture, and everyone knows it. You don't even need to be a regular church-goer to have heard this parable. But this fact also adds to the difficulty of preaching: everyone knows the story already. And so what new can be offered about a story so well known? Then two things happened during the week:

1. I came across a wonderful true story, and
2. I noticed a suggestion in a book of weekly homily starters ... a suggestion I had not ever considered before.

The story I came across forms the Introduction to a new book by Sebastian Junger entitled Tribe. It is a true story. It is as follows

The author himself remarks on two things in this story ...

A. He says the fact that the man was generous is not so remarkable ... many people are generous. But the fact that the man took responsibility for the author is really remarkable. He spotted me from town and walked half a mile out a highway to make sure I was okay. Many people go out of their way to AVOID someone. In our gospel today both a priest and a Levite did exactly this; they passed by on the opposite side. I know I have done it myself. The man in the story, however, went out of his way to ENCOUNTER someone and to see if he was in need. That is amazing!

B. The other thing is what helping a neighbor is really about ... Today's gospel story affirms what the man in the true story did. Having walked from the town the man gives the author his entire lunch box. In the gospel story the Samaritan personally comforted the injured man, transported him to a safe haven, paid for his care, and promised to return to see if more was needed. It is very clear that it is more than making a donation of cash, food, or clothes; sending a sympathy card; or promising to pray for others. Loving one's neighbor involves personal engagement and sacrifice of some kind.

Then the suggestionit was to at least once each day reach out, if only with a smile or a greeting, to someone who does not like you. That in itself can prove to be a challenge, but an even more challenging idea occurred to me: I usually think of reaching out to people I don't like the suggestion in the book

asked me to consider something totally different it asked me to consider reaching out to people who don't like me!!! There are people who don't like me? Could that be? Of course, and maybe I don't want to know how many, and much less who they are!! Imagine As I was preparing the homily I was made to think that there are people who don't like me, and the idea that I have not ever considered that fact in a serious way before reading the suggestion really startled me, and actually embarrassed me. It is pretty arrogant to think there aren't people who don't like you. It is narcissistic ... the same negative quality I have mentioned frequently to you as something that causes real problems in society today. It is like having to admit that I may be more like the Bibles' Pharisees than I had ever thought myself to be. To never have considered this fact is certainly to be out of touch with reality. And then the teaching of the Good Samaritan parable is that I am to love and take care of those who don't like me.

And old, old story but with some very new insights and reflections at least for me.

Today's First Scripture ends by telling us that these kinds of teaching, i.e., returning to God with all our heart and all our soul, is not out of reach for us. Actually it is very close to us. "It is already in our mouths and in our hearts; we only need to carry it out."