

15th Sunday year C, 2019

If I am alive today, it is due to a good Samaritan in my life. One evening in 1993, I woke up in the hospital bed with broken leg, broken arm and some head injuries. I could not remember, how I ended up there. Only thing I could remember was, that I went to visit a remote village on my motorbike. Next thing I knew was that now I was in hospital bed. I was told that I met with a motorbike accident and I was lying unconscious by a deserted roadside. I have no idea how many people might have passed by that road no body helped me for various reasons. Then one bus driver saw a young man unconscious by the road side. He picked me up, brought me to a nearest Catholic hospital where the nuns recognized me and treated me. This bus driver was a Hindu. And in India, Christians and Hindus do not get along well. When I got well, I tried to find the bus driver to say a thank you. But no success. Was he an angel sent by God as bus driver to save me? I would never know. Later, I came to know that there were some Catholic families by the roadside but nobody came to help me.

Today's Gospel gives the parable of a good Samaritan which is one of those Biblical stories which has become part of our culture – part of our language, even – so that, although many people nowadays might not know the story in great detail, they would still know that, if someone was described as a ‘good Samaritan’, it would be because they had helped a complete stranger in some kind of distress.

The bus driver who helped me was a complete stranger to me. I have never met him before. I tried to find and meet him afterward but could not. So, I will never meet him again.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus presents three philosophies of life concerning our relationship with our neighbor: The parable is actually an illustration Jesus used to answer a difficult question posed by the lawyer, “who is my neighbor?” He presents three possible answers: -

The first is the answer by the robbers. **Greed.** *“What is yours is mine; I will take it by force.”* This was their philosophy of life, and they were willing to use force to achieve their goals. *In one form or another, this philosophy has been practiced by many people throughout history. Many people of power have lived by it when they robbed and exploited the poor and needy. All the wars are clear example of this philosophy. The world is still full of such people who practice the philosophy of the robbers.*

Second answer is given by the priest and the Levite. – **Legalism:** *“What is mine is mine; I won’t part with it.* For the Jews, loving your neighbor was limited to one’s fellow Jews. Their philosophy of life was legalism. *“What is mine is mine; I won’t part with it.”* When they saw the injured and beaten victim on the road, they did not think of the victim but of themselves, they could only think of their own well-being. What if the robbers come back and attack them too? What if the victim is dead? If they touched the

corpse, they would risk being defiled and unclean for seven days (Num 19:11). They would not be able to exercise their duties in the temple.

Most of us probably find ourselves within this category of the priest or the Levite. Instead of helping the poor and the needy, we think only about our own well-being. Self-centeredness, individualism are some clear examples. When unborn babies are not allowed to be born, mothers are thinking only about themselves. People who follow this philosophy or this definition of neighbors, fail to share with others, fail to help others.

The third answer is found in the behavior of this Samaritan man. His philosophy of life was — Love: *“What is mine is yours as well. I shall share it with you.”* The Samaritan was generous enough to see the wounded Jew as a neighbor. He ignored the long history of enmity between his people and the Jews. Just as in my case a Hindu man forgot about the animosity between Christians and Hindus and helped me.

For us it may be shocking to learn that a priest and Levite pass by the road and did not come to help the wounded man. But it was not shocking for the Jewish listeners, as they acted for their own safety and followed the Jewish ritual of not touching a dead man before working as priest in the temple.

What was shocking to the Jewish listeners was the third answer to the question “Who is my neighbor?” They might have expected a fellow Jew would be the one Jesus would make the hero. But it is a Samaritan whom Jesus makes the hero of the parable. That was a shock. Jews and Samaritans hated each other. They were like arch enemies for historical reasons. It was a big shock for the Jews, that it was a Samaritan, hated by the Jews, who went over to help. He was the one who was the good neighbor; he helped the injured man, took him to the inn and gave two denarii, two days wages, to care for him until his return.

Traditionally humankind defined its neighbors as those related by kinship and bonding. Jesus changes this equation radically. “Neighborliness is not confined anymore only to blood relatives, or those we are related socially, politically and geographically. Jesus changes this equation radically. And gives a new answer to the question who is my neighbor. “Whoever has need of me is my neighbor. Wherever there is need, there lies my neighbor, and in serving him or her with love, I am in fact loving God. Such needy person could be in my own family or in far off places like India. This is the way to eternal life.”

We get many chances to practice this new meaning in our parish. Next weekend's Diocesan Mission Collection gives you another concrete chance to fulfill the roles of good Samaritans. This gives you a chance to help total strangers whom you have never met before and may never meet anytime in your life. As Jesus said to the lawyer in today's Gospel, he is saying all of you, “Go, and do as the Samaritan did.”