

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time: July 10, 2016

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“THE GOOD SAMARITAN: PORTRAIT OF TRUE HEALTH CARE AND ETERNAL LIFE”

The scholar in today’s Gospel asks the most important question ever asked of Jesus, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Really, this question is the primordial question that ruminates in all our hearts, the one we all ask in some way or another. Our desire to find love, happiness, acceptance—a purpose in *this* life—all comes down to the fact that we were created for the life to come. God has created the human person in his image and likeness and God has created us for Himself. As Augustine says so succinctly, “Our hearts are restless until they rest in God.” We all have a God-sized hole in our heart and we won’t be satisfied until we have a right relationship with God. Our quest for happiness is our quest for God, for eternal life.

The Jewish scholar in today’s Gospel is of no exception. He has followed the Law of the Mosaic covenant all his life. He believes observance of the Law will help him obtain the happiness we all desire. It has been for him the vehicle to God, and maybe even eternal life, the supernatural destiny we all have. The scholar has heard much about a new rabbi on the scene. He is a rabbi who preaches about God, his kingdom, and the law, but in a new and revolutionary way. The scholar questions this new rabbi’s understanding of the law and his authenticity. Would he really know what the Law was about, and would he know how to get to heaven? So the scholar of the Law sets out to test him. To make sure that this rabbi, Jesus of Nazareth, was the real deal, he asks him the question that is on the heart of every human being: “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

Jesus, being the good teacher that he is, answers the scholar’s question with questions of his own: “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” Without hesitation the scholar answers with the first and second commandments of the Law, “You shall love

the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus looks on him with love, as he did everyone he came in contact with, and says, “Do *this* and you will live.” But this wasn’t enough for the scholar, he wanted to justify himself. He wanted to really know what it meant to love one’s neighbor and who one’s neighbor really is. So he asks Jesus “and who is my neighbor?” This time Jesus does not answer with a question, this time Jesus is going to *show* him just what our neighbor looks like and just what love of neighbor actually looks like. He paints the picture of a man left for dead by some robbers. Three different men encounter the man in need. Two of them, a priest and a Levite, experts in the Law, decide not to help the man. Had they assisted, they would have been violating the Law and would be unclean, unable to participate in the worship rituals of the Law. It is the third man who decides to have mercy on the man. But the third man is not just any man he is a Samaritan, the sworn enemy of the scholar of the Law. It is the Samaritan who decides to follow not the letter of the Law but to follow the law of mercy, radically caring for the man’s needs, even paying for his recuperation. This is the example of which Jesus tells the expert in the Law to follow, not the priest, not the Levite, not those who followed the letter of law, but instead, the Samaritan, his sworn enemy, who showed mercy to one in need. This is what it is to follow Jesus; this is what it is to live out the eternal life Jesus offers us—to radically love God by loving and showing mercy to my neighbor. And as Jesus shows us in the Good Samaritan, we do so not on our own terms but on my neighbors’ terms, meeting them where they are at and addressing their needs, their wounds, giving all that is necessary that they might find healing, that they might experience love and mercy.

So profound is Jesus’ love of neighbor that his disciples have given up everything to follow him and “do likewise.” For 2,000 years the disciples of Jesus have brought Christian charity and mercy to their neighbors in the poor and needy. In fact the hospital as it is known today is an invention of Christians being “Good Samaritans” to those in need. There was a health care plan that was neither complex nor expensive; it worried little about financial or clinical metrics or data, but was quite simple. It emphasized care and health of both soul and body. Catholic health care is a mission of charity and mercy, the same as the Good Samaritan in Jesus’ parable. Catholic health care is the mission of Jesus, working for the common good, working to bring healing and mercy to those in need, bringing the eternal life the scholar asked about in the Gospel to the world.



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Unfortunately, health care today could seem less about bringing mercy and healing to one's neighbor, and more about government regulations and the almighty dollar. Perhaps rather than hearing about the complexity of government regulations and insurance mandates, we would be better to focus on the selfless work of dedicated men and women who simply treat the sick as if each one is the Person of Christ Himself.

May Catholic health care, and indeed all Catholics, stay the course of being a beacon to the world for what love of neighbor looks like, what living in eternal life and following the law of mercy looks like, and what true health care looks like: to be like the Good Samaritan and attend to the care of the sick, not as some job to be performed, but as an act of self-emptying charity. Not thinking about pleasure or profit, but caring for others as an important means to securing eternal life.

Now let us go and "do likewise."