

## **XII Sunday after Pentecost – The Good Samaritan**

*In the name of the Father...*

In today's gospel passage, the expert in the Law asking Our Lord: *what must I do to have eternal life?* recalls the rich young man who asked the same question,<sup>1</sup> to whom Our Lord answered: *If you would enter life, keep the commandments... you shall not kill, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness.*<sup>2</sup> Perhaps rather an answer to the question: *What must I not do to have eternal life?* Our Lord thereby confirmed that the Law given to Moses – the Law which He gave to Moses – which St Paul refers to as *the dispensation of death, carved in letters on stone*,<sup>3</sup> remains in force as indeed it must, articulating the minimum standard required of men.

Our Lord completed his teaching to the rich young man: *You shall love your neighbor as yourself*, a quote from the Old Testament Holiness Code: *You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another ... you shall not oppress your neighbor nor rob him ... you shall not curse the deaf nor put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God ... you shall do no injustice in judgment... you shall not hate your brother in your heart ... but you shall love your neighbor as yourself*,<sup>4</sup> commands to which no reasonable person would object.

The Holiness Code, however, also contains a host of prohibitions against pagan practices including the occult, sexual perversion and ritual child sacrifice: *You shall practice neither augury nor witchcraft ... turn neither to mediums nor wizards ... you shall not give any of your children to devote them by fire to Moloch ... you shall not lie with a male as with a woman, it is an abomination ... do not defile yourselves by any of these things, for by all these the nations I am casting out before you defiled themselves ... so that I punished [their] iniquity.* This, then, was a fuller answer to the question: *What must I not do to have eternal life?*

At Our Lord's prompting, and to his own question *what must I do to have eternal life?* the legal expert answered: *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 neighbor as yourself.*<sup>5</sup> The first and greatest commandment, then, is to love God without limit: there is no commandment to love God at a level which is comfortable for you. Man, therefore, is defined by the three-fold love of God, neighbor and self, i.e., by *charity* in which Christian perfection consists, which attains eternal life, which is eternal

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<sup>1</sup> [Mt 19:16ff](#); [Mk 10:17ff](#); [Lk 18:18ff](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Mt 19:18](#)

<sup>3</sup> [2 Cor 3:7](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Lev 19:11-18](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Lk 10:27](#); [Mt 22:37-39](#); [Deut 6:5](#)

life, which most properly is the image of God within us. Contrariwise, disordered love which centers on self loses eternal life, erring into *the dispensation of death, carved in letters on stone*.

The well-ordered love of neighbor is mediated by the virtues of *justice* and *mercy*. *Justice* is the virtue which disposes us to render to another that which is right or just, that which is owed according to some measure of equality. *Mercy* goes beyond *justice*, disposing us to have compassion according to right reason for another's distress, and if possible to alleviate it.

*Mercy* is thus a greater virtue than *justice*, because *justice* entails the notion of equality whereas *mercy* has the notion of excellence, of being able to alleviate the want or need of another. *Mercy* therefore is most proper to God, his omnipotence being manifested chiefly in his *mercy*.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, although *charity* is the greatest virtue, of the virtues which pertain to our neighbor, *mercy* is the greatest because it makes us most like God.<sup>7</sup>

The object of *justice* is right or just which entails no notion of evil: the object of *mercy* is evil.<sup>8</sup> As *mercy* is the more excellent virtue, God permits evil to give occasion for works of greater virtue. Indeed, if there were no evil in creation, much good also would be lacking, those works of *mercy*.

Evil may befall us in either body or soul, whence the corporal and spiritual works of *mercy*. Although the spiritual works are greater, the corporal works often are more pressing. The corporal works of *mercy* are: *to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, harbor the homeless, visit the sick, ransom the captive, bury the dead*.<sup>9</sup> The spiritual works of *mercy* are: *to instruct the ignorant, counsel the doubtful, correct the sinner, bear wrongs patiently, forgive offences willingly, comfort the afflicted, pray for the living and the dead*.

In today's gospel, we easily recognize corporal works of *mercy*. We can, however, also discern spiritual works of *mercy*. The parable's topography is instructive.<sup>10</sup> Jerusalem is an elevated place, twenty-five hundred feet above sea: it symbolizes obedience to God's law, *charity, the love of God without limit and neighbor as self*. By contrast, Jericho is the lowest dry land on earth, eight hundred feet below sea level. The antithesis of *charity*, it symbolizes the pagan practices prohibited in the Holiness Code. Indeed, upon entering the Promised Land, at God's command Joshua destroyed Jericho because of these practices. Introducing the Holiness Code, God had warned the Israelites: *You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in*

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<sup>6</sup> Collect, X Sunday after Pentecost

<sup>7</sup> [ST IIa IIae 30, 4, c](#)

<sup>8</sup> [ST IIa IIae 30, 1](#)

<sup>9</sup> [ST IIa IIae 32, 2, ob 1um](#)

<sup>10</sup> [The Road from Jericho to Jerusalem; Depressions with the Lowest Dry Land](#)

*the land of Canaan to which I am bringing you.*<sup>11</sup> God might have said: *you shall not do as they do in – i.e, you shall not go to – Jericho.*

Let us return to the parable: a man was descending from Jerusalem to Jericho, i.e., from *charity* to depravity. Having abandoned God's law and erred into the dispensation of death, they seize him, who in the Introit are *inimici mei, qui quaerunt animam meam* - my enemies who seek my life. With consternation, we discover a priest travelling the same way, who offers no help, no correction, perhaps having accompanied the sinner and discerned with him. Next comes a Levite who also fails to help, to correct. Finally, a Samaritan – a foreign layman – moved with compassion, gently helps the unfortunate sinner out of his misery, the two denarii he gives to the inn keeper for the man's treatment perhaps being those two commandments of the law which he had abandoned, love of God and neighbor.

This post-Christian world is reverting with increasing pace to the worst excesses of paganism – lying, stealing, killing, adultery ... the occult, homosexuality, the abortion holocaust – abominations proscribed by the Holiness Code and for the practice of which Joshua rightly destroyed Jericho. And yet there little or no protest - no correction - from the Church: except perhaps to bemoan that the fire by which Joshua consumed Jericho might have caused some damage to the environment.

Can each of us be a Good Samaritan? Fraternal correction of the sinner is not within common competency: it requires prudence and tact – wine and oil – and often requires a degree of superiority. It can also be very difficult to carry out, and therefore often requires *fortitude*. The neglect of correction, however – perhaps fearing accusations of the unforgivable sin of “being judgmental” – has led to widespread anti-social behavior and moral relativism in society. St Thomas observes of correction: *The reproof of the sinner ... seems to imply the severity of justice, but, as to the intention of the reprover, who wishes to free a man from the evil of sin, it is an act of mercy ... according to the proverb: better are the wounds of a friend than the deceitful kisses of an enemy.*<sup>12</sup>

In this alternative perspective, Our Lord's conclusion to the parable still holds good: *Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."*

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<sup>11</sup> [Lev 18:3](#)

<sup>12</sup> [ST IIa IIae 32, 2, ad 3um](#)