

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C
Dt 30:10-14
Ps 69 *passim*
Col 1:15-20
Lk 10:25-37

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St. Petronille Parish, Glen Ellyn
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Today is the 15th Sunday in this the “green season.” Each of the liturgical seasons has a basic theme. In Advent we pay special attention to the truth that the Risen Lord Jesus will come again. Christmas is the season when we ponder the mystery of the Incarnation, how it is that God became a human being. In Lent we come to grips with our human weakness and human frailty and how we need from year to year to refocus on the fact that God is God and we are not. Then in the Easter Season we celebrate the Paschal Mystery, and the truth that light is stronger than darkness, grace is stronger than sin, and life is stronger than death. The rest of the time is the green season, what we call Ordinary Time. The theme that runs through Ordinary Time is discipleship, what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

We call Jesus our Lord. We honor him as, in the words of St. Paul in today’s second reading, as “the image of the invisible God.” God wants to reveal the divine Self to us, but our minds lack the wherewithal to grasp and hold onto the immensity of God’s being. So, at every turn, it seems, we bump into mysteries – truths that exceed the limits of human understanding. The Trinity, the Incarnation, the Eucharist, suffering, evil, the human person, to name just a few. But, because Jesus is the image of the invisible God, we keep our eyes fixed on him, as his story has been preserved by the Church in the Gospels and in holy Tradition.

Jesus taught first by his life and secondly by his preaching. His favorite form of preaching was storytelling. St. Luke has preserved some of the most wonderful of Jesus’s stories. Only in Luke do we get the story of the Prodigal Son, where Jesus shows us what kind of father God is. Today Jesus tells another story, to teach us how we are supposed to live and act. In a question-and-answer dialog he teaches that the law of God – the law which Moses in our first reading describes as the law that is very near to us, already in our mouths and in our hearts – that the law of God is distilled into two propositions. First, love God with every fiber of your being. And second, love your neighbor like you love yourself. Love the other guy not as an other – separate, strange, and probably hostile – but love him as another you. Give up the dividing lines that separate us versus them. Instead, draw circles of inclusion.

And then he explained what he meant. It occurs to me that If Jesus were telling the story for the first time today, to us, in this place and at this time, he might have told a story not about a Jew and a Samaritan but maybe one about an African-American man

and a police officer. We, all of us, of course condemn the evil that caused that sniper in Dallas to massacre innocent law enforcement officers who were carrying out their duties in an exemplary fashion. We pray for that evildoer and we entrust him, as well as his victims, to the tender mercies of our loving Father.

But let's go back and focus on the injured Jew and the traveling Samaritan. After being ignored and abandoned by two fellow Jews – clergymen at that! – the injured man is rescued by a member of an outcast group. For centuries Jews and Samaritans had harbored grudges against one another. Those grudges ripened into deep-seated suspicion, fear, and animosity. The road between Jerusalem and Jericho was not a superhighway; it was a dangerous place, full of cutthroats and thieves. For all the Samaritan knew, he could have been walking into a trap. And yet he overcame his fears and suspicions; he ignored the centuries-old grudges and hostility between his people and the Jewish people. And he put himself out. He administered first aid, he gave up the use of his animal, he gave up his time, and he gave up his money to pay for the wounded man's treatment and care. This is the example Jesus chose to give us in teaching what it means to love our neighbor.

In addition to what happened in Dallas, we should pause a moment over the incidents in Minneapolis and Baton Rouge. The investigations are still underway, and we must reserve judgment in the meantime, but I think it's fair to say those incidents illustrate the high tension and hostility and fear that police officers are working under nowadays. The massacre in Dallas shows how reasonable it is for police officers to be apprehensive and jumpy. Our prayers must go out to them. The atmosphere of fear and distrust on both sides is a huge social problem, and there are no simple or easy answers. BUT at the retail level, so to speak, the level where we live, each of us is called to do what we can to draw circles of inclusion and avoid lines of separation.

My friend Bob shared a little verse with me, a verse that fits here, I think:

*He drew a circle that shut me out. // Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.
But love and I had the wit to win. // We drew a circle that took him in.*

In a few minutes' time we're going to form a procession; we will come forward to the altar, where we will be offered the Bread of Heaven and the Cup of Salvation. As we receive our Risen Lord Jesus truly present in the Eucharist, let us each resolve to be peacemakers, to bring peace and love and joy into the environments where we live and work and play, and let us ask the Lord of Life without ceasing to bring peace and justice into our troubled world.

In the name of the Father and of Son and of the Holy Spirit.