

Readings for the Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost
Extraordinary Form

2 Corinthians 3: 4-9

Brethren, such confidence we have through Christ toward God. Not that of ourselves we are qualified to take credit for anything as coming from us; rather, our qualification comes from God, who has indeed qualified us as ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter brings death, but the Spirit gives life. Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, was so glorious that the Israelites could not look intently at the face of Moses because of its glory that was going to fade, how much more will the ministry of the Spirit be glorious? For if the ministry of condemnation was glorious, the ministry of righteousness will abound much more in glory.

Luke 10: 23-37

At that time, Jesus said to his disciples: “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I say to you, many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.” There was a scholar of the law who stood up to test him and said, “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus said to him, “What is written in the law? How do you read it?” He said in reply, “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.” He replied to him, “You have answered correctly; do this and you will live.” But because he wished to justify himself, he said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus replied, “A man fell victim to robbers as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. They stripped and beat him and went off leaving him half-dead. A priest happened to be going down that road, but when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. Likewise a Levite came to the place, and when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight. He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them. Then he lifted him up on his own animal, took him to an inn and cared for him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction, ‘Take care of him. If you spend more than what I have given you, I shall repay you on my way back.’ Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the robbers’ victim?” He answered, “The one who treated him with mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

Who is my Neighbor?

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost – 2 Cor 3: 4-9 / Lk 10: 23-37
Ave Maria Catholic Church, August 28, 2022 – Fr. David M. Vidal

A scholar of the law asked Jesus: “*Who is my neighbor?*” Jesus knew his intention. The man was not honest; his purpose was to test Jesus. However, Jesus is merciful and kind; even though he knows the dishonesty of that man, he wants to heal his soul.

To do that, Jesus uses a parable. A parable is more than a beautiful story. A parable is a lesson that must be learned and accepted. The understanding of the parable requires some personal effort. To discover the meaning of the parable, we must have a mind that is open to truth and a humble heart that is willing to accept the truth. We must have a heart that is willing to be challenged and corrected.

First, let us look at the scene of this story: The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was notoriously dangerous.

It was a dangerous twenty-mile road. It was a road of narrow, rocky valleys and sudden turnings, which made it the hunting ground of thieves. In the fifth century, Saint Jerome tells us that it was still called “The Red, or Bloody Way.” In the nineteenth century, it remained necessary to pay safety money to local security before one could travel on it. When Jesus told this story, everyone knew it was a dangerous path.

In the Scriptures, Jericho is often represented as an image of the world. Going from Jerusalem to Jericho symbolizes a fall. The Fathers of the Church relate that the man described by the gospel as going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and falling into the hands of thieves is an image of Adam being driven out of paradise into the exile of this world.

Adam is said to be left half-dead, for our nature was not entirely corrupted by sin but was left in such a state as to be unable to raise itself to justification and friendship with God. Then, after Adam, we can also picture ourselves on the same road, when we walk on the careless path of sinful actions and are robbed of grace and friendship with God.

Now, let us try to discover the neighbor of that fallen man.

In his explanation of this passage of the Gospel (in the *Catena Aurea*), Saint Thomas Aquinas indicates that the doctor of the law was a proud man, and he thought he had no neighbor.

He knew the commandments of the law: “*Love God with your whole heart, mind, and soul, and your neighbor as yourself,*” however, he asked: “Who is my neighbor?” He is unwilling to recognize anyone as his neighbor.

In the parable, Jesus uses the image of the Priest and the Levite as those who simply pass by. In one way, it describes the heart of the doctor of the law who is unable to recognize his neighbor in his brother in need. In another way, it offers a reading of the history of salvation. The Priest and the Levite represent the Law and the Prophets that could not bring spiritual healing to humanity. The Law and the Prophets passed by and departed, unable to cure humanity.

Now, the figure of the Samaritan calls our attention.

A Samaritan traveler who came to the scene was moved with compassion. The Samaritan approached the victim. He wanted to offer his help. Following the interpretation of the Fathers of the Church, Thomas Aquinas discovers Christ in that Samaritan.

According to their heritage, Samaritans and Israelites were not neighbors. They were distant and separated. In many ways, they were enemies. Now, Jesus uses the figure of the Samaritan to reveal the distance between God and humanity. And even though we were enemies because of sin, God comes to us with mercy and compassion.

The Word of God is far removed from us according to nature; however, he took our nature out of compassion and became our neighbor. And now, Jesus is very near to us. Jesus comes to heal us and bring us back to life.

The actions of the good Samaritan are full of meaning.

The Samaritan pours wine and oil over the wounded man and then lifts him up on his own animal.

Like the good Samaritan, Jesus pours wine and oil over our spiritual wounds. The poured wine is a figure of the blood of His passion, and the oil refers to the anointing with the chrism and the sanctification that comes with it.

Like the good Samaritan, Jesus lifts us up on his own animal. The Fathers of the Church indicate that the animal signifies the humanity of Christ, which was an instrument of his divinity. It is by the humanity of Christ that we find salvation.

Afterward, the good Samaritan takes the wounded man to an inn. Likewise, Jesus brings us to the Inn. Here, the Inn is interpreted as the Church that receives travelers who are tired of their journey through the world and oppressed by the load of their sins. Then, the Church becomes the house of rest and healing.

Finally, the Samaritan asks the innkeeper to take care of the wounded man. That is precisely the command of Jesus to apostles and their successors. Jesus gave them the holy task of

caring for his flock by binding the wounded, strengthening the weak, and protecting the strong ones.

Let us return to the beginning. The scholar of the law knew perfectly well what was written in the law and was able to read: *“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.”* However, he was unwilling to recognize his neighbor.

Jesus comes to us not only to reveal the meaning of the law but also to heal our unwillingness to follow it. Jesus himself becomes our neighbor. He becomes our brother, the loving brother who cares for us. He cures our ignorance and heals our unwillingness to do good.

With the parable, Jesus not only teaches the scholar of the law that he must be a neighbor to the person in need, but he also shows himself as the paradigm, as the model we must follow. The scholar asks: *“Who is my neighbor?”* and Jesus answers: *“I am your neighbor who treats you with mercy . . . Go and do likewise.”*

The parable is a lesson that we must learn and accept. Let us ask for an honest mind and humble heart to listen, understand, and welcome Jesus’s teaching. Amen.