

*Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
July 14, 2019*

Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deluding yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his own face in a mirror. He sees himself, then goes off and promptly forgets what he looks like. (James 1:22-24)

Today's Gospel passage is familiar to all of us, the parable of the Good Samaritan. President George W. Bush alluded to it in the words of his first inaugural speech: *"I can pledge our nation to a goal: when we see the wounded traveler on the road to Jericho, we will not pass to the other side."* Queen Elizabeth II, in her 2004 Christmas message, summarized in these words: *"Everyone is our neighbor, no matter what race, creed or color. The need to look after a fellow human being is far more important than any cultural or religious difference."*

The passage opens with a lawyer trying to challenge or test Jesus. This testing is what we pray to avoid every time we pray the Our Father. When we pray "Lead us not into temptation," we actually are saying, "Do not bring us to the test." Yet, this lawyer is doing just that to Jesus. He asks two questions: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"; and "Who is my neighbor?" Let's examine these.

The first puts the "inheritance of eternal life" in a somewhat different light. The lawyer sees eternal life as an acquired material thing instead of a gift freely given. His focus has shifted from the commandment to love neighbor, selfishly looking only at his own salvation. He forgets that an inheritance is strictly in the hands of the giver. He is looking to redeem himself.

Jesus turns it around and asks the question, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" Notice the difference; "How do you read it?", not "What does it say?" Essentially, he says to him, "You're the expert here, what do you see?" He forces the lawyer to look at himself as through a mirror. Recall the quote at the top of this handout.

This brings us to the second question, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus' response to the first question puts the lawyer on the defensive, making him a little nervous. So, he attempts to recover by once again putting Jesus to the test. And again, Jesus hands it back to him in the form of a parable; a parable designed to test the lawyer.

We first see a priest and a Levite, both men of God, confronted by a bad situation. Both pass by on the other side avoiding the situation. Scholars have attempted to explain this many different ways. Some say that they thought the man dead and were worried about becoming unclean for touching the dead. Others, including Dr. Martin Luther King, say it was out of fear, "If I stop to help, what will happen to me?" Whatever the reason, their concern was about self and not for the man in the ditch.

Then came the Samaritan. He saw only a man in need and changed the question, "If I don't stop to help, what will happen to him?" The robbers had left the man for dead, taking all he had; the Samaritan gave aid to him and led him back to life.

At this point, let's look at what this really means to us. Who do we identify with in the parable? Some, like the priest and the Levite, turn their heads and pass by on the other side. Some are overwhelmed by the thought of helping others. Some may feel like the wounded man, beaten down and left for dead, wondering why bad things happen to good people? Finally, some may identify with the Samaritan, stepping up to help others, asking themselves the question, "Who am I a neighbor to?"