



Some reflections inspired by online copyrighted commentaries and homilies

**July 10, 2022**

**Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Jesus' favorite way of teaching was by parables. And no parable has only one meaning. For example, when we hear today's parable about the good Samaritan, we immediately place ourselves in the role of the Samaritan. We imagine that the parable is telling us to help others in need as the Samaritan does. This is a valid and common way of understanding the parable. In fact, we even have "Good Samaritan laws" which tell us that we cannot stand idly by while someone is in dire need. However, helping someone else is certainly a valid way of reading this parable. But it is not the only way of reading the parable.

A very different and more profound way of reading the parable occurs when we identify not with the Samaritan but with the man who fell in with the robbers. As long as we see ourselves as the Samaritan, we are the helpers, we are the ones giving to others. When we see ourselves as the man who fell in with robbers, we become the ones who need help, we are the ones who must receive. When we see ourselves as the Samaritan, the parable calls us to give to others in need. When we see ourselves in the role of the man in the ditch, the parable asks us to realize how God saves us. From the perspective of the man in the ditch, this parable is about the way that God helps us, the way that God brings us to salvation.

You imagine yourself in this parable. You are the person walking down the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. You are attacked by the robbers who strip you and beat you and leave you in the ditch half dead. You are in dire need, and you wait for someone to help you. Your heart rises as you see two honorable and respectful people coming down the road, the priest, and the Levite. But neither of them stops to help you. Then you see a Samaritan coming down the road. Now remember, at the time of Jesus, Jews and Samaritans were enemies to one another. In the world of the parable, seeing a Samaritan come down the road is seeing your enemy come down the road. Now then, you see the person you like the least, the person who has hurt you the most, the person over whose injuries you have brooded day after day. That person is now coming down the road. What will he do? Will he attack you? Will he ignore you? No. He stops to help you. You are now saved, but not in any way that you could have suspected. You are saved, but not by anyone you would have chosen to save you.

And this is the point of the parable. From the viewpoint of the man in the ditch, this parable tells us that God will save us, but not always in the way we expect or even desire. The parable tells us that God is in charge, and God will decide how salvation comes. Often God will lead us to life in ways that surprise us and even shock us. We all want life, life for ourselves and for those that we love, and we turn to God, and we ask for life. God hears our prayers and answers them, but not always in ways we anticipate. Sometimes the road to life is painful. Sometimes it passes through disappointments and failures. Sometimes we arrive at life only through the agency of people we do not like and would rather avoid.

God will save us. God will bring us to life, but on God's terms, not on our terms. We do not get to choose the way in which salvation comes, we can only embrace it when it arrives. That's why the fundamental stance of any Christian is one of surrender. However, it comes, our role is to surrender ourselves to God's mercy, knowing that God might choose to give us life in ways that we cannot anticipate and sometimes in ways we would not prefer. In the gospel, the lawyer asks Jesus the question, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" To that question, this parable answers, "Find your place in the ditch and wait."

Reflection by Fr. G. Smiga