

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year C

Deuteronomy 30:10-14

Colossians 1:15-20

Luke 10:25-37

Today's gospel contains one of Jesus' best known and best loved stories, the account of the Good Samaritan. Jesus told this story to assist a thoughtful scholar of the Jewish law in answering the question, "who is my neighbor?" The answer, of course, is "everyone."

We have seen this central teaching of Jesus come alive in our community in the last two weeks. So many people wanted to support the families of the five young women who were killed on June 26th. And they did it in so many ways. Even the Monday morning trash pickup in this part of the village was done earlier than usual on the day of Hannah's and Sara's funerals.

This neighborly concern extended far beyond the Rochester metro area. At the Life Teen Conference at Notre Dame University, Sara, Hannah, Katie, Bailey and Meredith were remembered during the opening Mass, and Marie Claus and our teen representatives were prayed over by the assembly.

We have shown our neighborliness in other ways as well. Just this past week our parish hosted a day camp for children from Rochester's inner city. A number of our teens were on hand to staff the camp, and Steve Petrovich, leader of the Life Teen Band, provided music.

And--there has been our support for the re-building of Resurrection of Our Lord Parish in New Orleans as well as the projects we have initiated or supported in Kenya.

Another example of reaching out to "neighbors" whom we don't know. In June of 2001 several women from the Czech Republic were driving on I-90 in Ohio and were hit by another car. Two were seriously injured. They were taken to a major Cleveland hospital, where they were terrified, because they understood little English. But people from the Czech community in Cleveland heard of the accident, went to the hospital and were able to act as interpreters. They visited

these women almost every day for three months. They were advocates and friends, providing transportation and places to stay for family members arriving from Europe. Last year I met one of the women and her husband. They have never forgotten what the folks in Cleveland did for them.

These are instances of true Christian discipleship, even when the people involved were not practicing Christians. We know it when we see it, but we are still unsettled. Far too often our attitudes and behavior are quite the opposite of what Jesus expected of his followers.

We don't always refer to our fellow human beings as "neighbors". In fact, we call many of them "enemies". There are people all over the world whose major goal in life seems to be the defeat or the annihilation of those they believe to be enemies. They are consumed by hatred and see compassion as a weakness. Right now their agenda is controlling everybody's agenda. There's the war on terrorism, for example, with no end in sight. So, we can be very good at neighborliness on a small scale, or for a short time. But on a large scale? No way. It's too frightening. A friend once proposed that Jesus' teachings were meant for individuals and church communities, but not for governments. Could he be right?

I don't know, but I hope not. I think that Jesus' call to discipleship is intended to apply to all people in every aspect of our lives. And "all people" include those who govern. Are we supposed to shut off our faith when we step into public service, or into any sort of work for that matter? What risks are we to take with our lives or the lives of the neighbors we're called on to love? Is everyone required to live out Christian discipleship in exactly the same way? If Jesus' command to love our neighbors is radical, just how radical do we get? Albert Nolan, a South African Dominican, wrote that "Jesus extended one's neighbor to include one's enemies. He could not have found a more effective way of shocking his audience into the realization that he wished to include all people in this solidarity of love."

Now "countercultural" is a favorite expression in today's church. And what could be more countercultural in our time than resolving to love one's enemies?

When I reflect on issues like these, I can get rather confused and anxious. Perhaps you can as well. That's why I found today's reading from Deuteronomy most encouraging. Jesus would certainly have known it. God's command, which Moses refers to, is summed up farther along in his speech by the exhortation to "choose life." But what Moses says in our reading is that God's law, and therefore God's presence, isn't somewhere far away. We don't have to go on a great epic quest to find God or to learn what God wants for us. God is

already with us—closer to us than we are to ourselves. The quest, therefore, is an interior one, whether it's taken individually or in community. If we can believe this, we are on the way to a deep and true understanding of neighborliness and of love. Perhaps, what Scripture is saying today is that God is the ultimate neighbor.

So let us be still, and let us know God....

Amen.