**15th Sunday C July 10, 2022 Dcn. Frank Olmsted**

**Deuteronomy 30.10-14 Colossians 1.15-20 Luke 10.25-37**

**St. Cletus Parish 9:30 and 11:30 am masses**

 **We heard from Moses in Deuteronomy, “If only you would heed the voice of the Lord, your God, and keep his commandments and statutes . . . with all your heart and all your soul.” The implication is clear: the folks were not heeding the voice of the Lord and they were not living what God had told them. Moses reminded them that the commands from God cannot be ignored or put off for the various excuses people use: God’s commands are not too mysterious; they’re clear enough, and they’re not too difficult to reach. God has made them intelligible enough. We know what they are because he has revealed them to us. We know in our hearts that this directive from God is perfectly reasonable and we have enough ability and common sense to live them.**

 **The Gospel also contained a discussion over the Law with a look at some important questions. It said a “scholar of the Law stood up to test Jesus.” “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Now Jesus and the scholar of the Law both already knew the answer. Jesus asked him a question: “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” In other words, “What do you think the Law means or implies?” I have been in classes and at conferences where someone will ask the teacher or presenter questions to which they already know the answers. Why do folks do this? Perhaps to let everyone else in the room know that they know a lot and are honed in on the speaker’s presentation and content or maybe to try to get an advantage over the speaker. We seem to have that here with the scholar of the Law, and he might be wanting to see if he can trip up Jesus on some point of Law or technical interpretation. The goal of theological discussion or of witnessing to God’s revelation should not be to try to trip the other person up. Let’s face it, having the correct answers doesn’t mean you know God or have a good relationship with him. Jesus doesn’t say, “Hey, Torah scholar, you’ve remembered well what you learned about the Law. Good job.” Jesus replied to him with the Good Samaritan**

**Parable. “Okay, you know the Law. Now how about going out and**

 **living it!”**

 **When the scholar of the Law answered the question from Jesus, “How do you read it?”, he answered pretty well:**

**You shall love the Lord your God. That, of course has to be the starting point. If not, why discuss anything further.**

**Next, you shall love the Lord your G od “with all your heart”.**

**This meantto love God with emotion, conviction, and passion.**

**Then, love God with “all your being.” This meant that you had to live out what you said you believed.**

**Third, love God “with all your strength.” This had to do with prioritizing things in your life. God had to be the first priority and thus, you had to put all your strength and energy into letting nothing come before the goal of living for God.**

**Fourth, love God “with all your mind.” This included acceptance of God and his Will intellectually and being confident in the truth of his revelation.**

**Finally, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” This one is always the**

 **kicker, isn’t it? This is always where the rubber hits the road with a thud. Have as much interest and concern for the needs of others as for myself. Show as much care for the welfare of others as I do for myself. Not so easy!**

 **The scholar of the Law knew this last part, love of neighbor, was always the sticking point. Moving out of the realm of thinking about these things and into the arena of doing something about them was always the difficult part, the part where our failure rate is often quite high. “Because he wished to justify himself, he said to Jesus, ‘Who is my neighbor?’” This very question suggested that in the mind of the Law scholar, not everyone was his neighbor, and thus it was not his problem if they were in need. Now to many Jews at this time “my neighbor” meant those who were good Jews who followed the Law faithfully and were in no way lapsed or ritually separated. This may have been how the scholar of the Law viewed it.**

 **To get across the point of who our neighbors are, Jesus used a Parable that was about as pointed as you could get. One group that**

**everyone in Judaism could agree was definitely *not* their neighbor was the Samaritans, people descended from Jews who had intermarried with conquering Assyrians seven centuries earlier, and who did not worship in the Temple at Jerusalem but built their own place of worship on Mt. Gerezim in Samaria. They still accepted the first five books of Moses, but rejected the prophets and all the other books of the Hebrew scripture. Jews considered Samaritans heretics who should be avoided if at all possible. In the parable, while no priest, Levite, or any faithful Jew would typically help a Samaritan, it is a Samaritan who takes a risk on that lonely road from Jerusalem to Jericho to take care of a likely Jew. If Jesus is suggesting that a Samaritan qualifies as a neighbor to a Jew, then wouldn't everyone so qualify? Indeed, they would, and therein is the point. Jesus is calling us to help others in need, to witness his message to others, to care for others, no matter who they are.**

 **When Jesus tells us everyone is our neighbor, or that we must be a**

**neighbor to anyone we meet, he does not mean we should accept or**

**tolerate what they do if it is evil. He does not mean we should accept their ideas or beliefs if they are wrong or dangerous or untrue. Jesus never tolerated evil or false teaching when he encountered it in his ministry. He confronted it head-on with the truth. His call to us in the story of the scholar of the Law and the parable of the Good Samaritan is to remind us that as members of the human community we are supposed to help others in physical, spiritual, moral, and psychological need to whatever degree we are able without concern for the background or history of the person in need.**

 **Wouldn’t Christianity be so much simpler and easier if we could just accept what God has revealed in Scripture and through Jesus, and live according to the teachings of the Church, receive the sacraments but stop short of this “good Samaritan thing”? But we can’t, if we really are Christians. That “good Samaritan thing” and “who is my neighbor thing” come up repeatedly in the teaching of Jesus. It's core and central to everything Jesus taught and did. It may be the hardest**

**part of Christianity.**

 **I had a student who accidently rammed a pencil into the palm of his hand trying to make some point (no pun intended) to his friends. As his hand started to bleed profusely, I had him lie down. He looked up at me and said, “Mr. O. are you going to tell me how stupid that was?” I said, “We’ll save that for another day, right now let’s try to stop the bleeding and get you to the hospital.” When someone is losing blood, or starving, or with no place to live, being a neighbor means bandaging the hand, finding food, or looking for shelter. What caused these things or how they came about is not unimportant, but it’s a discussion for later. Anyone I meet who has a need, is suffering or oppressed, hurting or confused, just trying to be born into the world or near the end of the earthly journey is the very person I’m asked by Jesus to help and to walk with in any way I am able.**

 **My palm-piercing student returned to school the next morning. “Thanks for taking care of me yesterday, and thanks for not reminding**

**me of my utter stupidity. My parents took care of that.”**