

Who is My Neighbor?

Gospel Wisdom*

*(*Wisdom is not just knowing things, it means seeing things as God sees them. As you read the Gospel, try to read with God's eyes and heart.)*

Read the Parable of the Good Samaritan – Luke 10:25-37

In the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus teaches us the two greatest commandments are to love God and to love our neighbors. To love God means to keep Him at the center of our hearts and minds. The parable tells us that we should also love other people – because they are created and loved by God. This second commandment can be hard. Even the man in the story, who was a scholar, needed help understanding this commandment. He asked Jesus – ‘and, who is my neighbor?’ We sometimes think neighbors are only those people who live near us, or who are our friends. Sometimes we set limits on who we see as our neighbor because they look, sound or act differently than we do. Using wisdom, the heart of God as your guide, answer the man’s question: who is your neighbor?



Loving Our Neighbors – Respecting the Dignity of Our Brothers and Sisters

Jesus gives us the Parable of the Good Samaritan to help us understand that we must love everyone for every person is our neighbor. To summarize the parable – a Jewish man is wounded and left on the side of the road. Two people walked past the injured man. We do not know why they chose not to help the wounded man – maybe they were too busy or thought because he was a stranger he didn’t deserve their care. The third man, the Good Samaritan, does stop. He makes time to care for the stranger, even though Samaritans and Jews of this time were enemies of one another. Jesus highlights the actions of the Good Samaritan to teach us that we should care for others – especially those who are treated as less important because of race, age, or ability. When we care for others, we show that we respect the dignity that God gives every human person. When we respect the dignity of others, we show our love of God.

Every life matters to God. As Catholics trying to live the parable of the Good Samaritan, God wants us to respect and protect the dignity of every human person – regardless of their race or where they were born. It is not only wrong to believe that those who are different from us are inferior – it is a sin. Racism is a sin against God and our neighbor because it denies the person’s dignity simply because of the color of their skin, or place of birth. When we deny the dignity of a person, we deny God because he created each person in His image and likeness. This sin of racism can be seen in our actions, and in the way we think about others. Racism can happen in the heart of a person, in a school, a team, a community, and even a nation.

Take a Stand Against Racism

When have you witnessed prejudiced or racist behavior? What was your role – were you a victim, a bystander, a passer by? Did you have the courage to stand against racism? Did you walk away? Write down your thoughts. List three ways you resolve to love your neighbors – those you know and those you don't know by name – by taking a stand against racism.

Present your list to God as you offer the words of Sister Thea Bowman as your own personal prayer.

“I want people to remember that I tried to love the Lord and that I tried to love them.”
Sister Thea Bowman

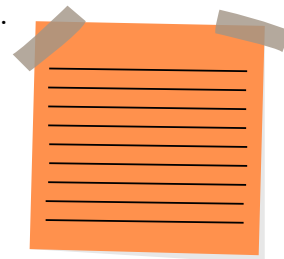
The Opposite Side

Gospel Wisdom

Read the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Luke 10:29-33.

The parable tells of three different men who encountered a man who had been beaten, robbed and left on the side of the road. The first man who passed by was a priest, the second was a Levite – a man respected in society. Both of these important men saw the man who was hurt but did not help him. They chose not to see the injured man, in fact, they moved to the opposite side to pass by him. Though they must have seen the hurt man, they made the choice to ignore him.

Image yourself in this Gospel story. Picture yourself walking in your neighborhood – maybe on your way to school or to a friend's house – and finding someone who is hurt lying on the sidewalk. What would you do? Would you pass them by? Would you stop to see if the person is ok? Would you call for help? Write down how you would feel in this situation and what you think you would do.



Helping Those in Need – Working for the Common Good

Catholics understand the Common Good as the right of every person to sufficient access to things/resources so that they can live fulfilling lives. This means that we must work to balance personal possessions and community resources for fair distribution to everyone.

The third man in the parable is our model for how to respond – he stops to help the man in need. Jesus gives us the example of the Good Samaritan to teach us how to love and serve our others, especially those in need. Every time we show care and respect for our others we are respecting their dignity and promoting the common good. To promote the common good means to work towards creating a community in which all people can develop and flourish to their fullest potential. It is everyone's responsibility – especially those who have a home, family, daily meal, safe neighborhood and school – to work to make sure those who have less, receive their fair share of resources. In helping others, like the Good Samaritan, we make the world a more just place for all God's people.

Many factors limit people's ability to grow and flourish in society. One of the factors that limits the common good for all people is racism. The sin of racism can lead a person, community, and even a nation, to establish laws and practices that place a group of people at a disadvantage in access to their fair share of resources because of the color of their skin or place of birth. This rejects God's plan for the common good by limiting a person's ability to enrich the community through equal sharing of their talents and resources. As Christians, we are each responsible for the good of every human person. We must help support the good of our brothers and sisters by standing up for equal access to food, to shelter, to healthcare, to education, to work.

Work for the Good of the Community

One way you can work for the common good is to look at what you have – the food and clothes in your home. Do you have more than you need? You take a step for the common good when you share from the things you have. Even better, buy something for someone who has less instead of buying something you want for yourself. Remember, each of us is responsible for the good of all people – regardless of skin color, background, or situation in life. Your actions, with the actions of those around you, can make the world the just society God wants it to be.

"It is an act of justice for the rich to help the poor."
St Josephine Bakhita

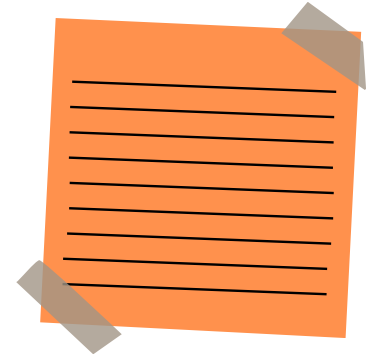
Moved with Compassion

Gospel Wisdom

Read the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Luke 10:29-34.

In this parable, Jesus tells us the Samaritan man was 'moved with compassion' when he saw the man hurt, lying on the side of the road. To have 'compassion' means to feel sympathy when you see the misfortune of others and be moved with a strong desire to ease their suffering. The Samaritan noticed the pain of the man in need. Moved with compassion, he bandaged his wounds and took care of him.

Think about a time in which you noticed the misfortune of someone. How did you show compassion for them? Write about what it felt like to help care for them.



Caring for Others with Compassion – Solidarity in Action

The Good Samaritan shows us what it means to be in solidarity with others. Solidarity is part of Catholic Social teaching – along with the dignity of the human person and the common good. Solidarity reminds us that as members of the human family, we must all take notice of injustice / needs of others and work alongside them to ease their suffering. This might seem hard, or not our problem. We may think we are not responsible for other people's suffering if we did not cause it. However, as brothers and sisters loved by God, we are responsible for one another. Jesus taught us to stand in solidarity with others who suffer in many ways – oppression, racism, poverty, illness or isolation – to raise up their dignity through our words and actions.

Throughout history, racism has caused many people to experience pain and suffering simply because of the color of their skin or where they come from. Those who have been victims of racism, or who have seen acts of racism against those in their family or community, experience great hurt. The sin of racism continues today. When enough people in a community think and act in racist ways, it becomes part of the culture. This racist culture then makes it possible to create laws and practices that put people at a disadvantage because of their skin color or place of birth. This is a very real pain that many of our brothers and sisters experience today. This must stop. Each of us must make the decision to be part of the solution. This is solidarity – taking the time to notice injustice and committing to change.

Stand In Solidarity With Others

The movie, *Just Mercy*, tells the story of a man who was accused and sentenced to death for a crime he did not commit. The following video clip explains how racism led to the injustice against Walter McMillian specifically, but also many other people of color:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-b_9PBKQgkQ

A first step in standing in solidarity with others is taking the time to listen to their stories. Reflect on the story of Walter McMillian, or perhaps you know of others who have experienced racism. How do you feel as you think about their stories? What can you do to stand with those who have been hurt by injustice, particularly racist words, acts, or practices?

"Compassion, my dear brother, is preferable to cleanliness. Reflect that with a little soap, I can easily clean my bed covers but even with a torrent of tears, I would never wash from my soul, the stain, that my harshness toward the unfortunate would create."
St Martin de Porres

Take Care of Him

Gospel Wisdom

Read the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Luke 10:29-37.

In the Parable of the Good Samaritan, two strangers – a Samaritan and an innkeeper – care for needs of a man who is hurt. Each one has a necessary part to do in helping the injured man get better. The Samaritan, encountering the man left of the side of the road, stops to take care of his urgent wounds. Knowing he must journey on, the Samaritan asks the innkeeper to care of the injured man by giving him shelter and food for his recovery. Working together, they use their unique gifts to care for someone in need.

God created us with our own unique gifts, and with talents and resources to share. Like the Samaritan and the innkeeper, we each are called to use what God has given us to serve – especially to serve the needs of others. Think about the gifts and resources God has given you. How can you use these gifts to serve of others?



We Each Do Our Part – The Basis of Subsidiarity

In the generosity of the Samaritan and the innkeeper, Jesus gives us a model of working for the common good for all. This Gospel highlights the Catholic principle of subsidiarity. In subsidiarity, we recognize the rights and responsibilities to care for the common good of every person. We practice subsidiarity when we share our gifts and talents, and allow others to share their gifts and talents, so that everyone can grow and flourish. We often practice this principle of subsidiarity in our families. As a family, we are each responsible for a specific chore or task in the home – one makes dinner, one fixes the table, one takes out the trash, etc. In carrying out our task, we contribute to the good of the whole family.

Subsidiarity can help us confront the evil of racism so rampant today. Too many people, or groups of people, are discriminated against based on their race, ethnic background, or place of birth. Racism can only be overcome by a commitment to love and care for the good of every human person. Though we may not have the power to eliminate the sin of racism in all people and structures, we do have a responsibility to confront discriminatory thoughts, actions and behaviors in our own lives and encourage others to do the same. Following the principle of subsidiarity, we must commit ourselves to never again use racist words, tell racist jokes, or participate in actions that diminish the dignity of another person. Subsidiarity requires that we not only stop discriminatory practices, but that we also work to create a community where everyone has equal opportunity to live, learn and grow into the person God created them to be.

Living Subsidiarity

What if, in the story of the Good Samaritan, he and the innkeeper had helped a person who had been beaten because he or she was a person of color? Rewrite the story to show how each person could live out the principle of subsidiarity to fight that instance of racism. What role would you play in that story?

"I have never felt I am a slave to any man or woman but I am a servant of Almighty God who made us all. When one of his children is in need, I am glad to be His slave."
Venerable Pierre Toussaint