

Homily for 15th Sunday Year C

Our very journey to God is invariably linked to a missionary journey towards our brothers and sisters, especially those alienated, discriminated, wounded, broken and in need of recognition, acceptance, inclusion and love. This is the essence of the scriptural lesson for this Sunday. In the first reading, Moses instructs the people as they journey towards the Promise Land. After the enemies had been routed, they enjoyed a period of peace, stability and prosperity. There was a real temptation, however, to focus on their immediate concerns and forget what they were meant to be: the people of God in mission. Moses reminds them of the covenant and the mission of making God and his concerns the centre of their existence. In the wider context, making God and his concerns the centre of their existence means to honour God and to seek his justice for the poor and the lowly. The second reading tells us about the divinity of Jesus and that Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation. Paul convinces them that all created things have a purpose and fulfilment in Christ. Christ is the active and final cause of all of them. Christ is the centre of unity. In his life on earth Christ brought God's saving love to bear on the fallen human race. Go and do likewise." This seems like a pretty clear command from Jesus. We just heard the parable of the Good Samaritan, so what is it that we are to go and do likewise? I think there are three things that seem to go to the core of what Jesus would have us do: see, draw near, and have compassion. Seems clear, straight forward – something we can do, yes? There is a danger of becoming a Good Samaritan: *Once an old man was standing on a crowded bus. The young man standing next to him asked, "What time is it?" The old man refused to reply. The young man moved on. The old man's friend, sensing something was wrong, asked, "Why were you so discourteous to the young man asking for the time?" The old man answered, "If I have given him the time of day, next he would want to know where I am going. Then we might talk about our interests. If we did that, he might invite himself to my house for dinner. If he did, he would meet my lovely daughter. If he met her, they would both fall in love. I don't want my daughter marrying someone who can't afford a watch."*

The priest and Levite give the man in the ditch a wide berth, creating even more distance between them, but the Samaritan draws near and become vulnerable in that closeness. It is in the closeness that one is opened to the pain, the misery, and the need. Maybe that is what the priest and Levite really are hoping to avoid? Once the Samaritan has seen the man and drawn close, he displays compassion, tending his wounds, transporting him to the inn, making sure he is taken care of. Seeing is vital, drawing near imperative, yet the final and meaningful gesture is that the Samaritan actually does something about it. Seeing, drawing near, and having compassion – offer us an example of what it is to be Christ-like. When we fail to see, draw near, and help those we mistrust or fear or just want to ignore, we risk missing the saving presence of God in our lives and in the world. Today we remember the seafarers. It's the stranger that Stella Maris (Apostleship of the Sea) port chaplains and volunteer ship visitors are there to help when they go on board a ship. Like the Samaritan in the gospel, they are concerned for the welfare of those they meet. The help they give might include providing a mobile phone top-up, warm clothes in the winter, or arranging for seafarers to attend Mass. At other times, it might mean helping a seafarer resolve an issue with his employer over pay or working conditions. The Gospel calls us all to help the stranger. Stella Maris chaplains and ship visitors do this in ports around the world. We can do it where we live, by supporting Sea Sunday and Stella Maris. "Love begins at home, love your family and your neighbours. Share with the poor and the needy around you- your smile, your word, your time, your belongings" - **St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta**. It's well to remember that Deuteronomy's law of love was given while the people were on their journey to the Promised Land, and that the Gospel parables were told while the disciples were still on their way to Jerusalem. Perfect charity is a challenge all through life. Along that journey there can be stops and even wrong turnings, but if we remember the Good Samaritan we can renew our desire to follow his example.