

For Your Reflection

This is the first in a series of occasional reflection sheets Jesuit Refugee Service aims to produce and send out with our newsletter. This reflection has been provided by Rampe Hlobo.

“Go and do likewise”

We may know that Jesus’ ministerial life was filled with all kinds of challenges and tests from the priests, lawyers, Pharisees, Sadducees, etc. The one interaction of Jesus and a lawyer that came to be famous we find in the Gospel of Luke (Lk.10: 25- 37). In this Gospel passage we are told that an expert in the law or a lawyer stood up to put Jesus to the test. He asked him, “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus asked him, “What is written in the law? How do you read it?” The lawyer answered: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all you’re your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.” “You have answered correctly,” replied Jesus. “Do this and you will live.” Wanting to justify himself, the lawyer asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbour?”

In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. By chance a priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So likewise, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denari and gave them to the innkeeper saying, ‘Look after him and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense

you may have.’” Jesus then asked, “Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” The lawyer replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

The first part of this passage, about which I will not comment much, is about the greatest commandment that is essential in our faith as Christians: The love of God and one’s neighbour. It is in loving God and our neighbour, we are told, that we shall live. St. Augustine commenting on the epistle of John, tells us we cannot say that we love God while we do not love our neighbour. Whoever claims to love God, says he, but does not love his or her neighbour, is a liar. According to Augustine whoever loves his or her neighbour, necessarily loves God. He probably said this having in mind the fact that we are all created in the image of God.

The second part of this passage is however, provoked by the lawyer’s attempt to justify himself. To justify his typical, limited Jewish interpretation of the word neighbour to “one who is near,” in terms of members of the same people and religious community, that is, fellow Jews. There is no problem with the love of neighbour whatsoever, but the lawyer seems to prefer limiting one’s neighbour to Jews only. Hence the endeavour to justify himself and to defend the limited interpretation of the law.

In narrating the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus shows us clearly that my “neighbour” is not only the person close to me, like a member of

my family, a friend, a compatriot or whoever thinks like me. My neighbour, like in the passage of the Good Samaritan, is anyone who is in need. It is someone that I must help if he or she needs my help, just like the Samaritan who gave freely his time and money to help a Jew who was not only a stranger but was also of a different religion, a foreigner, and an enemy of his people.

An important point to note here is that by the time of Jesus, for political and religious reasons, the Jews and the Samaritans had been hating each other for hundreds of years. With that in mind, we can easily understand that there was no one that the lawyer would have considered to be less of a "neighbour" than a Samaritan. If a Samaritan could be a "neighbour", to a Jew who fell into the hands of thieves, the very person who perceived him to be an enemy, then the interpretation of the word neighbour can be extended to everyone regardless of race, religion, nationality or any other artificial boundaries or distinction.

The challenge to love one's neighbour, as we can see from the Good Samaritan, can however, be very costly. It can cost us our time, money, pride and can be an inconvenience. It is however a challenge that we are called live up to. Especially if we have the means to help. The Samaritan used his bandages, his own supplies to cleanse and soothe the wounds and he took up the inconvenience of walking while he put the stranger on his animal.

The love for one's neighbour can also be free and not costly. By simply valuing or appreciating the other person we show that they have worth and they are human beings created in the image of God. For example, those who have their rights violated like refugees. Have we ever stopped and thought about the refugees as our neighbours who have

fallen into the hands of robbers? Do we give them the respect they deserve and treat them as we would want to be treated? Or have we also failed to love like the robbers who inflicted pain on the traveller; the priest and the Levite who also failed to love by being indifferent? The Samaritan doesn't move to the other side of the road, but when he sees the wounded man he takes pity on him. Love, sympathy, and mercy are motivated by the need of the other. We have failed to love if we have caused human suffering or have been indifferent to human suffering.

"Go and do likewise" is the challenge that Jesus gives to the lawyer after he had narrated the parable and helped him figure out who his real "neighbour" was. It is a challenge to go and look upon people, not as inconveniences but as an opportunity to serve and practice that love for the neighbour. It is a challenge to overcome one's prejudices and show kindness to all, irrespective of their origins or beliefs. It is a challenge to show one's love to refugees by supporting them, pleading their cause, fighting for their rights and knowing that whatever we do to them we are doing to Jesus Christ our Lord (Mt. 25: 40). We are all challenged to go out of our way, helping others without any excuses, knowing that our motivation is love for them, an interest in meeting their basic needs, and a heart of mercy that is moved by compassion. Go and do likewise and you will live!

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