

Father McDonough's homily for Sunday July 15th, the 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

One of the things we notice about the scene the Gospel passage today is that the person who asks our Lord what he should do understands very well what is written in the Scriptures about what is expected of a person but we see when it comes to putting it into practice, that person needs help because he had to ask our Lord who is my neighbor. We are like that man in that we need help in knowing how to put the teaching into practice sometimes and the way ask our Lord for that help to do that is by listening to our Church, our bishops, our pope and what they teach us God's commandments mean for us today. There are some today who would not think they need that guidance from the Church and that would be like the person in today's Gospel not asking our Lord for guidance about what the Scriptures mean and instead just making up his own definition of neighbor. We do not see the person in today's Gospel feeling oppressed or feel that his freedom was being restricted by the teaching our Lord gave him. In the same way we are to see that the teaching of our Church does not restrict our freedom but rather guides us as the person in today's Gospel was guided. The person in today's Gospel might have felt restricted in his freedom because now he would have to help others because that was the lesson he learned from our Lord's parable but we know if that was his feeling, he was wrong.

We notice in the Gospel passage the Samaritans were considered to be people who were not expected to do the right thing but those who would feel they were good people, the priest and the Levite did not do the right thing whereas the Samaritan did do the right thing. That is a reminder to us that we must be careful when we think we are never wrong because the parable teaches us those who everyone thought would do the right thing did not. We do not have to fear we will do the wrong thing as long as we follow that teaching God gives us in the Church.

That love of God and neighbor our Lord speaks about in the beginning of today's Gospel is done by following the Ten Commandments and the teaching of the Church is that the Ten Commandments are written on the heart of every person whether they are believers or unbelievers and that is called the natural law but because of personal attitudes and education those commands of the natural law might not be clearly understood by some. We know one of those personal attitudes that could prevent a person from seeing clearly what the natural law commands is selfishness. So we need prayer and God's help to overcome those attitudes.

The Navarre commentary explains that the priest and Levite were probably making an excuse for themselves on a technicality, that is that they would be considered unclean according to the rules of their religion if they touched a dead person. So they were taking the easy way out by assuming the person was already dead and told themselves they were only wanting to keep from being unclean, so they did not bother to check to see if the man was still living. That reminds us to examine our decisions to make sure we do not take the easy way out.

As the person in today's Gospel was seeking instruction from our Lord how to live, St. Bernard of Clairvaux says that in seeing whether we have made progress spiritually we can never say that we are fine where we are right now. As long as we live we can never say that. St. Bernard, in speaking about advancing in the spiritual life says, we should be as eager to make progress in the spiritual life as those who are ambitious for material wealth. As we continue this celebration Our Lord gives us grace in Communion to be like the Good Samaritan and follow the teaching he gives us in today's Gospel.