

SS. PETER & PAUL

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Rev. Joseph McCartney, Rector

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Gospel Reading ~ Luke 10:25-37

Epistle Reading ~ Galatians 2:16-20

Apostles of the Seventy: Erastus, Olympas, Herodion, Sosipater, Quartus, and Tertius

This Week at a Glance

Sat, Nov 16th

6:00 pm - Great Vespers

Sun, Nov 17th

9:00 am - 3rd & 6th

Hours

9:30 am - Divine Liturgy

ADULT ED - Church

Etiquette

Adult Ed

Coffee Hour

Topic for next week's Adult Ed Coffee Hour is Church Etiquette. If you've ever had a question about why we do certain things in church or if we are doing them right, now's your chance. Bring your questions. If you have any ideas for future classes, let Fr Joseph know.

Gospel Meditation

To go down on one's own from Jerusalem to Jericho is, even today, not without risk. In the time of Jesus it was fraught with peril. The fate of the lone traveller in today's parable of the Good Samaritan, is almost anticipated; he is beaten, robbed, and left for dead. He lies in the ditch naked, without the signs of either nationality or social status, both of which were indicated by what people wore. He is simply a person in need. Now, 'by chance,' the story goes on to tell us, a priest and a Levite came along and, when they saw the naked man in the ditch, crossed to the other side and passed by. The priesthood in Jerusalem, it should be noted, constituted a kind of Jewish nobility or upper-class. The priest was regarded, therefore, as a prominent representative of Jewish piety. The Levite, also, commanded respect in the community. He belonged to an order of lower clergy who served in the temple as teachers, gatekeepers, musicians, and janitors. The priest and the Levite are the ultimate insiders. The people listening to Jesus' story would surely have expected that they are brought on the scene precisely to take care of the man in the ditch, to show him love and mercy. They were, like we are, shocked by the revelation that these two religious leaders, instead of showing love and mercy, callously walked past a man dying on the side of the road.

If the priest and the Levite could be sure that the half-dead man was a neighbor, they were in duty bound to save him. That is what Leviticus told them: "You shall not stand by the blood of your neighbor" (19:16). But then, there were those laws forbidding them to touch a corpse. If the half-dead man died in their hands, they would be defiled for seven days (Numbers 19:11-19), and therefore out of work! So, the priest and the Levite decided to take no chances. Mercy can be a risky business, and they knew it.

The next character to appear in the story is a Samaritan. One might have expected a Jewish layperson. After all, the traditional triad at the time of Christ was "priests, Levites, and all the people of Israel." These were the three categories of

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Gospel Meditation continued

... the social hierarchy that dominated Judaism after the Babylonian Exile. Maybe one of “the people” would come along and show the mercy withheld by the priest and Levite. But the story shocks its hearers by bringing on scene, instead, a Samaritan. Two hundred years before Christ, the writer of the Book of Sirach called the Samaritans “no nation” (50:25-26), Samaritans were excluded from the temple cult in Jerusalem. They could not witness in court because they were judged to be liars. One of the most insulting names Jesus is called by his fellow Jews is “Samaritan” (John 8:48). Yet the only fellow traveller on that Jericho road who stopped to help a dying man was this hated outsider. Now, we are not told what the priest and Levite felt when they saw the man in the ditch. Fear may have taken hold of them, fear for their own skin. But we are told that the Samaritan was moved with compassion. Compassion is the bridge between simply looking on injured and half-dead fellow human beings and entering their world with loving care. The Samaritan went over to the injured man, bound up his wounds, probably with strips of his own shirt, (because the man had been stripped naked), and poured in oil and wine. Oil and wine, by the way, were also the elements of the daily temple sacrifice (Leviticus 23:13). What irony then, that the Samaritan, the outsider, is the only one in the story who offers the true sacrifice! Here is someone whose people did not recognize the Hebrew prophets doing exactly what Hosea had called for centuries earlier: “I desire mercy and not sacrifice” (6:6). The Samaritan “then set the man on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, “Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.” The Samaritan not only saved the victim’s life, he saved his dignity.

Significantly, and no doubt deliberately, the account of the Samaritan is the longest part of the parable. For the parable is not only an example story: “Go and do likewise” (Luke 10:37), it is a metaphor for the kingdom of God preached and brought about by Jesus, in which God is constantly surprising us. The story is a jolting reminder that the wisdom and grace of God is so much bigger than our petty human understanding. The grace of God is no respecter of places or persons. The story is also a challenge to the Church to see itself not as an institution built on the prideful distinction between the laity and the clergy, but, as a hospital in which wounds and the wounded are healed.

Everyone traveling that road from Jerusalem to Jericho was vulnerable. The Samaritan, because he was a Samaritan, was doubly vulnerable. Yet, it was this very vulnerability that gave rise to his compassion. He saw neither Jew nor Samaritan lying wounded on the road. He saw a naked fellow human being.

