

TRINITY XIII 2015
SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
FATHER JOHN ALTBERG
LUKE 10.23

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*LOW EXPECTATIONS–
SAMARITAN SHOWDOWN...*

Turned into a novel, this could well be the title for today's Gospel! **THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN** is repeatedly cited to describe how society ought to behave...that is precisely the point Jesus illustrated to the Pharisee/lawyer who stood up and challenged him to a showdown... OK Jesus, **you've** got all these tidy answers about living forever, just how do you propose **I** do this?!

Well...we have heard it twice this morning...once in the Gospel and in the regular place (at every Mass)...the Summary of the Law. These words of Jesus are so important that we are reminded of them constantly. The question for us is not the same as the challenger in the story had for he had not yet received the answer. We have already heard what Jesus had to say so the question for us is... "how well are **we** following what Jesus taught?"

That, my friends, is the StJP meditation assignment for this week. The Summary of the Law...**Love God, Love Your Neighbor.** Ask the person in the mirror... "how well am **I** doing?"

We know the essential content of the Parable of the Good Samaritan. The Samaritan takes pity on someone who has just experienced really bad luck - being beaten and robbed. This was pre EMS, ER, HMO, Medicare, Medicaid...turning the matter over to Health and Human Services wasn't an option...this man is in real trouble. Without thought of repayment, the Samaritan takes over, pays the bills, promises to follow up and take care of any additional expenses. It's a heartwarming story and we feel good just reading about it...pretty good guy, this Samaritan. We readily agree that this is the way things should be...if only things were different...

But there is a lot more to this as we look beyond the story itself...the popular name of the story itself, the Good Samaritan gives a clue to the complexity. If this is the "Good" Samaritan does that presuppose that all the others are "Bad"? Well, in the context that Jesus tells the story because Jesus' challenger would already be convinced that ALL

Samaritans were bad...Jesus drops the piano on him by even suggesting that a Samaritan would be capable of any "good" thing.

The Samaritans were despised by mainstream Jews... considered an underclass... yes, they were Jews, but sectarian Jews, not the "right kind of people"; they did not possess "full" religious practice. Remember Jesus points out that the injured man's needs were first ignored by a priest and then a Levite, the most respectable of the Jews in town. Then comes the despised and disreputable Samaritan and does what the others certainly **should** have done.

The most unlikely showed the **only** compassion shown. The story ends with Jesus asking the lawyer, which one of these three do you think did the right thing? The story has a good ending when the lawyer clearly has got the message and says "the one who was kind." Jesus says, "then you go and do the same thing."

We don't know what happened...the story ends there. But we can assume that the lawyer had a lot to think about and we can hope that he developed a broader understanding and behavior from that point forward. If he followed what Jesus told him to do it would not always be easy or popular with the rest of the community...some would clearly conclude that he had gone outside the bounds and was now dealing with a less than desirable person...a social misfit of the day. People who need help are often less attractive, less fortunate, perhaps even less appreciative. Their problems are often complex or ugly or expensive and may be all of the above.

There are at least two major lessons here...one, don't assume that just because someone has a different heritage, they are less capable or less likely to do the **right** thing. Two...when a need exists, act on it, don't walk on by and leave the tough, unpleasant job for someone else...you are called clearly to act and the neighbor you are called to love and show compassion may well be someone you have never before met. Do the same thing for this person that you would do for yourself.

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