

## FIFTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

July 14/2013

Deuteronomy 30; 10-14; Colossians 1: 15-20; Luke 10: 25-37

### Introduction

A tourist visiting Jerusalem was much impressed by the piety of the Jews he found praying in front of the Wailing Wall. He asked one elderly gentleman, "How often do you come here to pray?" The man said: "Every day; every day I face this holy wall and pray." "That's wonderful," the tourist said, "and what do you pray for?" The man said: "Peace for Israel, peace for the world." The tourist was impressed and he asked: "Do your prayers get answered?" The Jewish gentleman looked exasperated and said: "No, they don't. I might as well be talking to a brick wall."

The parable of the Good Samaritan is about *walls*. Let me explain why. The words spoken by the lawyer in today's Gospel, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself", are taken from the Book of *Leviticus*. However that same book tells God's People to have nothing to do with the Gentile nations around them. It is clear then, that by "neighbour" *Leviticus* means only those people who are within the walls of the Jewish people. Keeping in mind that Samaritans were not Jews, we can see Our Lord's parable of the Good Samaritan as calling on us to take down the walls we put up in our lives. I want to consider those walls. There are spiritual walls, psychological walls, and social and economic walls.

### Spiritual Walls

You may have heard the little poem, "Mr. Pious went to Church. He never missed a Sunday. Mr. Pious went to hell, for what he did on Monday." There is a constant danger that we will reduce our religion to the performance of certain ritual acts and feel that, as long as we keep within the spiritual walls created by those actions, we're alright. The priest and Levite in today's Gospel are a classic example of that attitude. They were on their way to the Temple. If they had touched a dead body they would have become ritually unclean and so would have been barred from participating in the Temple worship. So we can see them avoiding that person in the ditch. He might be dead! Their concern for observing ritual while neglecting mercy should serve as a warning to us that our religion is not just about performing certain religious or ritual acts, but is also about becoming truly caring persons. St. Vincent de Paul, a 17<sup>th</sup> century French priest who spent his life serving the poor in the streets of Paris, told the members of his religious community that they should not hesitate to interrupt their community prayers in order to serve the poor, even if the rule of their religious order required them to be present for prayers at that time. He said: "Charity is certainly greater than any rule."

### Psychological Walls

Catherine Doherty, the woman who founded Madonna House in Combermere, Ontario, once told a group of seminary students: "When you become priests, I beg you to *walk* through neighbourhoods so you can meet people and see what is actually going on in their lives." Of course her point was that the automobile has become a way of building walls around ourselves. The automobile helps us to live wrapped up in our own agenda, busy about our own concerns, shutting out much of what is happening around us. How easy it is for us to retreat into our own narrow world. I encourage young people to listen to

the news. This is our world: the millions of people with AIDS, the victims of wars, the street people, as well as those who may be suffering down the road from us.

### Social and Economic Walls

During the terrible war in Rwanda in the 1990's half a million people were killed simply because they belonged to the wrong tribe. Though there were many Catholics, including priests and sisters, who were real heroes in that war, the fact remains that the Catholic Church as a whole did not come out of this war with a very good record. A Church report published after the massacre said this about the Rwandan Catholic Church: "The Church never found enough courage to look squarely at the fault line of ethnic division that runs right through its own leadership: bishops, clergy and religious communities. Plastering over the problem with pious talk, the Church could not speak with conviction and credibility to the nation in times of crisis." That is scary! It says something important to us about the ethnic and cultural walls we sometimes put up in our own lives. Are we good to our own group, whatever that may be, but contemptuous of outsiders? Do we choose to ignore the fact that Canada is officially a bilingual country and a multicultural society? Do we treat aboriginal people as second-class citizens?

Then there are the economic walls. In Canada the bottom 20% of our households get 5% of the national income while the top 20% get 44% of that income. This effectively divides people into separate worlds. What is especially disconcerting is that our social and political policies as a country have kept it this way for more than fifty years. We need to keep the parable of the Good Samaritan in mind when we cast our vote in various elections.

### Conclusion

So today's Gospel calls on us to look at our walls, our spiritual walls, psychological walls, social and economic walls, and consider what we have to do in order to bring them down. One of the favourite medieval interpretations of the parable of the Good Samaritan saw Jesus as the Good Samaritan and the human race as the man lying in the ditch. When you look at the parable in that way there is simply no doubt at all about how a Christian, called to imitate Christ, should act.