



October 3, 2004 - Archbishop Sean O'Malley's Homily at the Red Mass at St. Matthew the Apostle Cathedral, Washington, DC

Your Eminence, Cardinal McCarrick, Your Excellencies, reverend clergy, distinguished guests, members of the John Carroll Society, brothers and sisters in the Lord,

It's indeed a great joy and a great privilege for me to be able to participate in your Red Mass. In some ways it is like coming home. I worked in this parish as a deacon and for my entire priesthood. In fact, I celebrated my first public Mass at that altar for the Spanish community many years ago and, of course, I want to congratulate Cardinal McCarrick and Monsignor Jameson for the wonderful renovation that has taken place here.

It's also a joy to be back in Washington with my community as we celebrate tonight and tomorrow the feast day of St. Francis. I'd like to open my remarks by sharing with you one of my favorite stories from the life of Francis: a certain conversation that he had with Brother Leo in which Francis was asking Leo, "Leo what was the special way in your life that allowed you to discover God?" Leo at first was very reticent and didn't want to answer, but Francis kept on insisting and insisting so finally Brother Leo said, "Well if you have to know, by the grace of God I was born lazy, and because I was lazy I was able to discover God in my life. If I had been like my brothers and sisters, they were very ambitious and enterprising and went out and made a lot of money, but I like to go out into the fields and look at the beauty of nature and listen to the birds singing. At night I'd go to my father's roof in his house and contemplate the stars and the moon and I'd ask myself, "Where did all of this beauty come from? At first it was just a curiosity, but it became a burning hunger to know the source of all goodness and beauty. And so, I say, by the grace of God, I was born lazy and that laziness allowed me to discover God."

I suppose the real moral of the story isn't that we should be slothful, but that we do need to make time and space for God in our lives.

We are here in this Red Mass making time and space in our lives for God. If we truly discover God, we will discover who we are and why we are here. The process begins with prayer. When Mother Teresa visited us in New Bedford, Massachusetts she spent hours greeting the people. I saw her giving out little business cards. I thought it was her E-mail address so I got one. The card had one of her phrases:

"The fruit of silence is prayer, the fruit of prayer is faith, the fruit of faith is love, the fruit of love is service."

Jurists always want to understand the laws and their nuances well. However, the Lawyer in today's Gospel posed his question with hostile intent, "to put Jesus to the test." The lawyer is not really pursuing the truth, but rather he is trying to set up a sparring match with Jesus. Jesus breaks through that paradigm and focuses the lawyer on the pursuit of understanding the truth. Jesus does this by means of a parable whose title has become part of our common parlance. For we describe a civic minded person as a Good Samaritan and even refer to the laws of some states where one has exemptions from tort liability in helping injured persons as Good Samaritan laws.

The scene opens with the lawyer's question: "Who is my neighbor?" At the end of the Gospel passage Jesus poses a new question: "Which of these three proved neighbor to the man who fell among robbers?" The lawyer's question puts himself at the center. We all have a little Lloyd George in us. It is said he would not go to a wake unless he could be the corpse. For all of us the most radical journey we must make is away from egocentrism; the biggest challenge is to cease to be the center of the world.

The way Jesus frames the question shifts the center from the lawyer's "my neighbor" to "who is neighbor to the man in need." The victim of the mugging becomes the center of attention.

In the parable itself we see how the priest and Levite rushed by. Perhaps they were fearful of ritual impurity or being exposed to the same dangers posed by muggers lurking nearby. Presumably it was not a safe neighborhood. The two clerics saw the figure on the road, but they did not see him the way the Samaritan did. Very often the suffering are too hard to look at, too offensive, or too invisible.



When the Samaritan saw the wounded dying man, he felt compassion. That compassion is the shock of the awareness of another, and one who is suffering.

The poor or the suffering are invisible. When the Holy Father visited a certain Latin American nation, the government built a wall along the route from the airport to the city to hide the slums. The people called it "the wall of shame." Too often we shut out the poor, the sick, the elderly, behind a wall of shame.

The Samaritan saw, really saw the pain of an individual who was not only a stranger but even an enemy, yet the Samaritan's compassion made him a neighbor, a brother. The Samaritan is not just moved by the sight of suffering humanity, he takes practical steps to help. He is not about to excuse himself due to "compassion fatigue." He binds up the man's wounds, sets him on his own beast and brings him to an inn. No doubt the Samaritan's kindness has saved a life.

The compassion of the Samaritan alters his plans. He had programmed his journey with food, drink and money. At the inn he takes the risk of a promise that is open, without predetermined limits. When the lawyer asks, "Who is my neighbor?" He wishes to define his obligations. He wishes to know in advance what he must do and what he need not do. The Samaritan ventures into unknown territory.

After asking which of the three have proven neighbor to the man who fell in with the robbers, Jesus says: "Go and do likewise." Jesus points out that we need to make ourselves neighbor to the one who needs us. We are called to create a relationship that did not exist before.

"Go and do likewise." This is an invitation to construct a society that does not yet exist, a civilization of love. It is stretching toward a community in which the alien, the stranger, the unborn baby, the Alzheimers victim, the AIDS patient, the poor are truly our neighbors.

Ultimately, this means losing the small identities that separate us from each other. The Samaritan has been liberated from that small identity as a foreigner or a Heretic. He has become a neighbor. The ones who retain their original identity are those who just walked by, the priest and the Levite. They miss the opportunity to discover a new way of being human.

Jesus is teaching us to love our neighbor as ourselves. This means much more than loving your neighbor as much as yourself. It means loving him as part of yourself. We love the members of our family as ourselves, because they are part of who we are. To love a stranger as myself is to discover a new identity which transforms me. In this love we discover our connectedness to God and to others. Our ability to love is linked to our ability to survive as a people. I am convinced that democracy can survive only where there is solidarity and a sense of interdependence among people. This requires that democracy be based on the true and solid foundation of non-negotiable ethical principals. Such was the firm conviction of Washington, Jefferson, Adams, DeToqueville and a host of people who launched the democratic experiment in this part of the world. Pope John Paul II in Centesimus Annus concurs with this reasoning:

"Authentic democracy is possible only in a state ruled by law, and on the basis of a correct concept of the human person... If there is not ultimate truth to guide and direct political activities, then ideas and convictions can easily be manipulated for reasons of power. As history demonstrates, a democracy without values easily turns into open or thinly disguised totalitarianism."

As George Weigel has said: In the Catholic view of things democracy is like a house. A democracy must be built on a firm foundation, like any house. That foundation is not political or legal: it is cultural. A democratic political community is built on and sustained by a democratic culture.

The foundations of the house of freedom are the virtues of the people and the moral truths that provide a framework for society. As the Holy Father wrote in *Fides et Ratio*: "Truth and freedom either go hand in hand or together they perish in misery." In a society in which truth is neither mentioned or sought, every form of authentic exercise of freedom will be weakened, opening the way to libertine and individualistic distortions and undermining the protection of the good of the human person and of the entire society."



The religious Jews speak of the tikkum olam, “repairing the world.” We Catholics also feel called to cooperate with God in repairing our world. Building a culture that can support a democracy is a special challenge. For over two centuries religious voices have called Americans to be a better people, to challenge the institution of slavery and the legacy of racism it left behind, to question the morality of war and nuclear weapons, to defend the interests of the poor, women, immigrants, prisoners, to defend the Gospel of life.

Too often when politicians agree with the Church’s position on a given issue they say the Church is prophetic and should be listened to, but if the Church’s position does not coincide with theirs, then they scream separation of Church and State.

Democracy thrives where people have a deep sense of community and a willingness to make sacrifices for the common good. Our modern culture is addicted to entertainment and obsessed with celebrities who have replaced our heroes and who hold up to our young people the false ideal of a chaotic, self-absorbed existence in frenzied pursuit of money, fame and pleasure.

Our faith challenges us to embrace an ideal of self-denial, and sacrificial love at a time when the defining ethic of our politics has become a simple rule: “We should all get what we want.” It is an ethic of self which cannot sustain the House of Freedom, cannot sustain democracy. The distinct impression we get today is that no principles are sacred, everything is up for grabs, if you have enough money and enough votes, all things are possible, a sow’s ear can become a silk purse.

In the face of the challenges at hand, we appeal to Catholic jurists and intellectuals and all people of good will to help rebuild consensus around the foundational principles necessary for democracy: the dignity of the human person who has both rights and responsibilities, the inalienable right to life, the relationship between truth and freedom, convictions about the common good, the centrality and importance of marriage and family, the need to nurture and protect the most vulnerable members of society, the need for solidarity among people.

The Biblical notion of Justice is that of fidelity to the demands of relationships. Justice in the Old Testament was not a question of human deserving, of human laws. The Israelites were to give to others what they themselves had been given by God. For Israel the practice of justice thus understood was an expression of a steadfast love.

Similarly the Holy Fathers have called on us to build a civilization of love or there will be no civilization at all. That is the demanding justice we are to practice.

If we are going to be able to counter the culture of death with a culture of life, if we are going to counteract an ethic of self with a civilization of love, we must learn from the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

The Good Samaritan was willing to take risks, to pay a price, to identify with a stranger and become a neighbor to that man abandoned by the side of the road.

Love and compassion have a ripple effect in the world. If we could write the sequel to a Good Samaritan II, like Rocky IV or Jurassic Park III, we might imagine how the children of the Samaritan and the Jewish man he helped might befriend each other or contribute to each other’s welfare overcoming religious and cultural barriers.

In the late nineteenth century a Member of Parliament journeyed to Scotland to make a speech. Alighting from the train in Edinburgh, he took a carriage southward for his destination. But the carriage got mired in mud. To the rescue came a Scottish farmboy who with his team of horses pulled the carriage loose. Afterwards, the politician asked the boy how much they owed him. “Nothing,” replied the lad. “Nothing, are you sure?” “Yes.” “Is there anything I can do for you? What do you want to do with yourself when you grow up?” “I want to be a doctor.” “Well, let me help.” True to his word, the aristocratic Englishman helped make it possible for the Scots boy to go to the university.

A little more than a half-century later in another continent, a world statesman lay dangerously ill with pneumonia. Winston Churchill had been stricken while attending a wartime conference in Morocco. But a wonder drug was admin-



istered to him a new drug called penicillin, which had been discovered by Sir Alexander Fleming. Fleming was the young Scottish lad, and the man who had helped sponsor his education was Randolph Churchill, father of Winston, who recovered through Fleming's miracle drug.

The bread cast on waters may come back in the form of miracles. Love is contagious. Selfishness pollutes the atmosphere, love opens new doors. Martin Bubber used to say men find God by discovering each other. Love is the key to the mystery of existence and points the way to God. Every particular Thou is a glimpse through to the Eternal Thou.

The Good Samaritan thought he was helping a man in need. He did not realize he was stretching his own heart, ennobling his own soul and by doing that making the world a better, a safer, a happier place to live. As John Paul II says over and over again: "Human fulfillment is achieved only by making a gift of ourselves to God and to others."

The Japanese have a wonderful parable about a man who lived in a beautiful home on the top of a mountain and each day he would go out in his garden and take a walk and look at the sea below. One day he noticed on the horizon a huge tsunami rushing towards the shore and then he saw a group of his neighbors down on the beach having a picnic, so he wanted to warn them. He began to shout, began to wave his arms. They were too far away, they couldn't see him, they couldn't hear him.

So, do you know what that man did? He went in his beautiful home and he set it on fire. When his neighbors on the beach saw the smoke and the flames, some of them said, "Let's climb the mountain and help our friend to save his home." The others said, "Oh, we're having so much fun here and that mountain is so steep, you go."

The ones who climbed the mountain to help their neighbor were saved and those who stayed on the beach having fun, when the tidal wave hit the shore, they perished.

Climbing the mountain of love, means leaving behind our own self interest, convenience and personal ambitions to put ourselves at the service of another, to bind up the wounds of a stranger who is suddenly our neighbor, our brother or our sister.

May Jesus' words to the lawyer hasten our steps on this journey.

"Go and do likewise."

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