

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time “C” Cycle July 9-10, 2016

Mindful of the troubling racially charged violence of the past week in our nation, we pray that all of us in our own small sphere of influence may be agents of peace and reconciliation. Many years ago, you may remember the California trial of the white police officers who were acquitted of using excessive force in subduing Rodney King, an African American.

The not-guilty verdict triggered riots by some African Americans. One victim was a Japanese American young man, whom a mob had dragged from his automobile and began beating him. A young black man named Gregory Williams, who was driving through the riot area, stopped, intervened, rescued the unconscious victim and drove him to the hospital.

Later, in appreciation, Takao Hirata, the Japanese American victim, gave Gregory Williams a miniature samurai helmet. A samurai is a protecting warrior. “You are my samurai,” he told Williams. Not only was Gregory Williams a samurai, he was a Samaritan, a good Samaritan like the one we heard proclaimed in today’s Gospel parable.

This parable is one of Jesus’ most beloved. It has inspired artists such as Rembrandt and Van Gogh, has had hospitals named in its honor, and has become a part of our language.

The telling of this parable was in response to a scholar of the Jewish Law who approached Jesus at first with a question about how to “inherit eternal life.” As usual, Jesus passes the question back to him by asking what does the law say? The lawyer recites the famous Jewish shema found in the OT books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy about loving God with one’s entire being and one’s neighbor as one’s self.

It is when the lawyer asks: “who is my neighbor?” that Jesus tells the parable. True or false: Jews and Samaritans were very friendly toward one another? False, they barely tolerated each other! This is why Jesus chose the Samaritan as the hero in the parable, whereas the Jewish priest and Levite come across poorly. Only the good and compassionate Samaritan saw the stricken man as a neighbor in need. Jesus did this to emphasize that knowing the Law, in its full meaning, should lead to living it.

It was difficult for the lawyer to admit that the Samaritan acted as a true neighbor. When Jesus asked him which one, he couldn't say Samaritan, but only "the one who treated him with mercy."

The point of the parable is obvious. To be Jesus' disciples, we must care for others, especially those in need. We may not encounter dramatic scenes of disaster and danger, like Gregory Williams, but we can strive to be more patient with family members and co-workers. We can be polite and courteous to strangers in public.

Perhaps we can be more tolerant and understanding of people of other cultures and beliefs. We can give time and energy to community and parish projects. Perhaps we can donate blood or service hours. Perhaps we can participate in programs like "Aid For Friends."

With the help of God's grace, may we follow the direction Jesus gave to the lawyer: "Go and do likewise."