

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR (C) (2022)

A) ALTRUISM

- the story of the Good Samaritan is a story about altruism
- altruism means living and acting for the interests, not of oneself, but of someone else
- and the Good Samaritan shows three kinds of altruism:
- altruism which is universal, altruism which is dangerous, and altruism which is excessive.

B) UNIVERSAL ALTRUISM

- The Good Samaritan's altruism is UNIVERSAL. It extends to everyone. It does not have any limits or boundaries.
- We know that, at the time of Our Lord, the Samaritans were the sworn enemies of the Jews.
- They were considered to be heretics
- they were Northern Jews who had intermarried with foreign settlers
- when the southern Jews returned from exile in the Sixth Century BC, they refused to allow the Samaritans to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem
- in response, the Samaritans established their own rival priesthood and Temple.
- Jews and Samaritans did not speak to one another. They certainly did not go to one another's aid.
- So the Samaritan was doing something very unusual in coming to the help of a sworn enemy.
- It is as though he simply recognised another human being in distress, and did not take any notice of what kind of man he was, what nationality or religious group he belonged to.
- The Priest and the Levite, who were closer neighbours to the traveller, did not want to get involved; and it was left to a foreigner to show true neighbourliness in action.

- Jesus himself is sometimes described as THE Good Samaritan.
- He is the one who comes to the aid of fallen humanity, a humanity at enmity with God because of sin, and yet unable to help itself.
- Jesus shows UNIVERSAL altruism, because the salvation he brings, the message of peace and reconciliation he bears, is not limited to a particular group or nationality or community or Church. It is for everyone.
- We might ask ourselves whether our goodwill, our altruism, is UNIVERSAL. How do we measure up?

C) DANGEROUS ALTRUISM

- the Good Samaritan displays an altruism which is DANGEROUS.
- He did not hesitate to stop and investigate the needs of the man by the roadside.
- He was in enemy territory. The Jews would be hostile to him. Perhaps the bandits were still around.
- Perhaps this man by the roadside was not really hurt, but simply setting a trap for an unsuspecting passer-by.
- And then, what would happen if the Samaritan got involved in some complicated mess?

- What about the plans for his journey and what lay at the end of it? What if he had to get his hands dirty and blood on his clothes?
- The Samaritan did not stop to think of any of these things. Here was someone in distress, and he could help.
- Jesus, THE Good Samaritan, also showed a DANGEROUS altruism.
- In his public ministry, he set out resolutely to preach the love of God and the Kingdom of God.
- He showed that that Kingdom was present by his teaching and his miracles, and he built up not only a steady following, but also a steady and growing opposition to his work.
- But he did not hesitate or draw back once the work was begun.
- His mission was to take him to Jerusalem and to certain death. But he did not flinch from what the Father was asking of him.
- and how do we measure up to that?

D) EXCESSIVE ALTRUISM

- Then finally the Good Samaritan shows EXCESSIVE altruism.
- HE went to the help of the victim, and saw to his immediate needs. He bound up his wounds, comforted him and took him to an inn.
- Surely that was enough. Would we not be tempted to pass him on to someone else at that point, and let them take responsibility?
- But in this case the Samaritan asks the innkeeper to look after him, and promises to make sure that all expenses are met.
- When we think of Our Lord as the Good Samaritan, we see that here too his altruism is EXCESSIVE. He goes to the limits of love.
- He did not need to become a man for us, but did so.
- He did not need to live out a life of poverty and humility, but did so.
- He did not have to suffer and die for us, but did so.
- It was in this way that he went to the ultimate lengths to convince us of his love for us, and how valuable we are to him.

E) CONCLUSION

- Jesus tells then parable of the Good Samaritan, but he teaches not only by word but by example
- his love, his altruism, is UNIVERSAL (because no-one is excluded),
- DANGEROUS (because he gives no thought to the consequences for himself),
- and EXCESSIVE (going to the very limits of love).
- And then we can ask ourselves, How do I measure up to that?

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(based on a Homily by Rev Martin Luther King)