

**T**he Word of God always seems to speak to the moment and to the events of the days in which we all live—not to “then,” but to “now.” For some that is a challenging concept—to apply God’s word to the actual events of the day and hear God speak, not to individuals only, but to the nations and whole peoples.

These are days and this is a time, of “*infinite sadness*,” as threats and actions done in our name begin to be carried out. Amazingly, we hear, in the midst of these events, familiar words, with a vision and a promise that cannot be ignored; even a response which strikes to the very heart of the sadness of these days: “*The command I enjoin on you is not too mysterious or remote for you....it is very near to you, already in your mouths and in your hearts; you have only to carry it out...*” “*You shall love the Lord your God... and your neighbor as yourself!*”

Last week, in the Scriptures, we encountered God as Mother and we were reminded that any authentic journey of faith and life breaks the barriers of male and female, culture, nationality, religious heritage, or immigrant status. Those distinctions are not valid for persons of faith on the road of life. We have a long way yet to go.

So the journey still continues as we meet today in the Gospel six persons who represent whole communities or institutions then and in our own time:

**First, the Robbers...**the victimizers, so lost and selfish themselves that they believe only their needs count, only their perceived rights are acceptable. They can do little but blame others, separate and divide, hate and insight fear. They like to “rob” people of dignity and seek to affirm that only people like themselves are of value. These “robbers” are happy to leave suffering humanity on the side of road.

**The Priest:** For us “the Church,” too often bound by self-interest and “the way things have been,” to reach out in mercy and compassion—sometimes more afraid to act, serve or change than non-believers; and at other times choosing to make the Gospel of Christ a mere comforting story of times gone by rather than

the light by which the signs of these times are to be seen: revealing suffering humanity dying on the side of the roads of our world, churches, nations and cities.

**The Levite:** This one represents the law, government, power protecting itself; seeking to blame the powerless on problems self-inflicted, organizing to “round them up,” separate families and send them away, as if this act will save us from ourselves. How easy it is to justify such actions against those perceived as different; How easy to remain divided and unwilling to step out of ideology to meet the real needs of real people left dying on the side of the road, some left by the very ones sworn to serve and care for them.

But the great sadness is the utter silence in the face of such inhumanity, by those who can only say in their heart, “they are not my neighbor,” but dare to proclaim, “I am still a Christian.”

Then there is **the one beaten down**, stripped of dignity, justice and hope, alone and insignificant, ignored and forgotten, and often blamed for every ill; the one lost in despair for whom no one seems to care and for whom, they are told, “there is no room.” He or she, the young boy or girl, the innocent child: they are different, unlike us, “illegal,” unworthy. “They do not belong.” Words uttered and actually believed by too many who claim to follow Christ.

Then along comes an unexpected savior, feared by all the others who have just passed; a **Samaritan**: “a foreigner,” “an alien,” one on the edge, disliked, judged, and whose religious and cultural values are suspect, and feared. One who could not expect a welcome in the place to which he was traveling.

Then **the innkeeper**, the one to whom the victim was brought and entrusted, with the simple words, “*Take care of him.*” We are not told of the response. Perhaps because we are the innkeeper hearing that plea today! Yes, today, in the midst of the events and threats of our time.

We could speak at length of each one and who they might be in these times.

But REMEMBER for a moment: someone, a stranger perhaps, who was neighbor to YOU or to your ancestors: --one who bound your wounds, gave you and your family of long ago, a home; provided a place for you to speak, to cry, to be silent, to be healed, to laugh again and to be loved. Remember the welcome you were given. What was it like to be the one in need? Or the one who was refused a welcome?

Are you and I ready to admit that sometimes we are on the side of the road, beaten and wounded? Maybe we are all there today as a people, as a nation. Can we accept compassion, mercy, unconditional love, and could we accept these from one, even from many, who are different, and unlike “us?”

Remember too, the many times we, the church, have been and are today the inn to which the wounded from the side of the roads are brought, cared for and healed. Remember too, when we, the church in this place, “*looking into the signs of the times by the light of faith constantly devote ourselves to the service of the Gospel,*” when we hear the words: “*Take care of him; take care of her.*” DO NOT SEND THEM AWAY.

Remember too, the good so many of our country do in binding wounds: people calling for justice, mercy and compassion; speaking for the unheard; actions and gatherings such as the one in Missoula this past Friday evening and continuing today in the cities of our state and country. Remember too our own Church and other faith communities mobilized at our Southern border, caring, serving, saving and protecting, binding wounds on the side of the road and carrying the “neighbor” to a place of real refuge.

We are all still on the road making our way through the world of wonder and tragedy.

We too, though, need to receive compassion and mercy ourselves, letting others lift us up and carry us to a welcoming “inn.” Binding our wound of silence and division, judgement and neglect. The journey with Christ is not just about giving, it is also about receiving.

Perhaps we are the Samaritans of our time, different and not always welcomed; unexpected healers, soothing the wounded left on the side of the roads, bringing them to the “inns” of our neighborhoods and cities and to this inn, to this place, to the “innkeepers” here with the words, “*Take care of this person, of these persons;*” and “*We will take care of her; We will take*

*care of him.*” We will not send them away and we will not be silent, because we see our neighbor; we follow Christ and believe in his word and promise.

The Word of God is spoken, not just in ages past, but today, in this time: “*it is something very near to you... and in your hearts, you have only to carry it out:*” “**YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD...AND YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF!**”

In the face of today’s threats and actions done in our name, it is good to remember these words of Pope Francis:

*We must be reminded of Jesus’ words in the Gospel of Matthew: “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” (9:13) It is a finger pointed at the sterile hypocrisy of those who do not want to ‘dirty the hands,’ like the priest and levite in the parable of the Good Samaritan. This is a temptation powerfully present in our own day. It takes the form of closing our hearts to those who have the right, just as we do, to security and dignified living conditions. It builds walls, real or virtual, rather than bridges.” ...We are to embody in our day “that parable of the Good Samaritan, who stopped to save the life of the poor man beaten by bandits. He didn’t ask where he was from, his reasons for traveling or his documents... he simply decided to care of him and save his life.” (Homily at Mass for migrants, July 6, 2018)*

“No human being is illegal.” Elie Wiesel

**THIS IS OUR VISION AND OUR WORK: “OUR INFINITE SADNESS CAN ONLY BE CURED BY INFINITE LOVE.”**

*Pope Francis*

## WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

