

SERMON AT ST. MATTHEW ORTHODOX CHURCH  
NOVEMBER 12<sup>TH</sup>, 2023

LUKE 10:25-37

“THE GOOD SAMARITAN”

Today's gospel reading from Luke 10 is one of the very best known of our Lord Jesus Christ's parables. Here is a quick recap of the story: A man was traveling through the countryside and was attacked by violent robbers. They stole all he had and beat him very badly, almost to death, and left him in the ditch. Soon after, a priest came by---but he didn't stop to help. Perhaps he was worried that he would be late for a service at the temple. Then a Levite came along---a Levite was the Old Testament equivalent of a deacon or subdeacon. He also didn't stop to help---maybe he was in a hurry to help with the service at the temple. Then a Samaritan came along. Samaritans were seen by the Jews of that time as being a no good people---yet it was the Samaritan who stopped to help the man who had been beaten. He poured wine and oil on his wounds, bound up his wounds, took him to a nearby inn for medical care and rest---and paid for everything. He totally disrupted his day and plans so he could help the poor fellow.....

Those who came down the road that day had 3 different perspectives on the situation.....  
---The robbers perspective when they saw the man was-----“What is yours should be mine---I will take it!”  
---The priest and Levite's perspective was----“What is mine is mine----I will keep it! No help for you....”.  
---The Good Samaritan's perspective was----“What is mine isn't really mine, but God's...I will share it.”

(in Message of Sunday Gospels, I, p. 60, Father Anthony Coniaris)

Christ, of course, in this parable is giving us that #3 perspective, that of the Good Samaritan, to be our example. He is calling us to be like the Good Samaritan-----to share our lives, our time, our energy, our money, all that we are, with those that need help, like the man in the ditch in the story.

Perhaps some of you who were part of our parish in its early days may remember Larry Walker who joined us, along with his wife, Beth, about 30 years ago. He had left the

Episcopalian priesthood to enter Orthodoxy. He wasn't seeking to be an Orthodox priest, but to live as a layman. He was only with us about 2 years, because his doctor convinced him to move to New Mexico because of his health problems. He did so and not long after died.

After he had been with us for a while, he said to me, "Father, I really like this parish. But you have one thing lacking. You have no organized outreach to the poor---the parish just isn't doing anything like that." He was right. We were very new then and just hadn't start doing any helping of the needy. So he asked if he could go ahead and organize monthly serving of meals by our church to the poor at St. Herman Orthodox Homeless Shelter. And he took on that task---and we still do that today. And that gradually led to all the various ways of helping those in need that our parish now has going on. It all began because Larry Walker saw a need and acted on it. His wish to see the poor helped, and his willingness to lead that work, changed our parish for the better in a big way! Thanks to Larry, who was only with us a little while long ago, there are now many opportunities through our parish to be "Good Samaritans".

But it's not only through organized parish ministries that you can be a Good Samaritan. In your own personal lives, opportunities will come along, you will come across a "man in the ditch" whom God will call you to help. And as you do so, you will grow and mature in Christ.

Did the priest and Levite experience spiritual growth that day when they refused to help? I strongly doubt that! But I am sure the Good Samaritan did! If you wish to grow in your faith, to draw closer to the Lord, be a Good Samaritan. To grow spiritually, some common recommendations are to pray more, read the Bible, attend lots of church services, be regular in the sacraments---very good advice. But being a Good Samaritan is also a huge factor in growing in the Lord. Because helping others means self-denial---and self-denial brings us closer to Christ. The Good Samaritan practiced self-denial in a huge way that day---he totally disrupted his life, he gave up all kinds of time, and gave up some of his money as well. And I am sure that all drew him closer to God.

Years ago, at the archdiocese convention in 2005 in Detroit, Father Anthony Gabriel in a sermon told us a story from long ago---there was a monk who thought he needed to "find Christ". He was a faithful monk, but felt distant from the Lord. He decided that what he needed was to go on a long pilgrimage----all the way to Jerusalem. There he would pray in the Holy Sepulcher Church where Christ was buried and rose again. By making that trip and praying there, he would find Christ. The abbot gave him permission to do lots of basket weaving and to keep the profits from the sales to pay for the big trip. For quite a few years he worked hard and saved up all the profits----until he had enough to go. So he put the money in a bag and went walking down the road on the long, long trip. He had only gone a few miles when he came upon a man and several children begging at the side of the road. They were obviously destitute and starving. The monk stopped---and had a very intense interior struggle. Finally, he gave the beggar the bag full of money-----and turned around back to the monastery. The pilgrimage was cancelled and he knew he would never be able to again save up enough money to go later. As he walked back home, great joy came over him---he realized he had just found Christ! And no longer needed to go to Jerusalem.....

To find joy like the Good Samaritan did, to grow like he did---to find Christ---keep your eyes open for someone in the ditch! Don't turn away like the priest and Levite. Be willing to do something outside your comfort zone. Be willing to disrupt your comfortable schedule, to give up some time and money----to help someone in need and to draw closer to Christ.

This can take place in your own life, and it can take place through the ministries of our parish. There are brochures on the table in the narthex that list all the various ways our parish strives to help those in need (thanks to Larry Walker for getting us started!). Grab a brochure. Read over the part about helping those in need. Think and pray about it—and decide how you can take part in one those ministries. And if you figure out where you can help, contact the person listed for that particular outreach..... And you will be on your way to being a Good Samaritan.

There are plenty of people in the ditch needing our help. As a follower of Christ, Christ wants you to be a Good Samaritan to them.

Years ago there was a movie called "The Four Feathers", set in the late 1800's. The main character was an Englishman named Harry Faversham. He had a friend serving in the British army in Sudan in Africa to whom he needed to personally deliver an important message. So he went to the Sudan---and while searching for his friend he got hopelessly lost in the wilderness. He ran out of food and water and ended stranded on a little desert path, near death. An African man named Abou Fatma happened to find him. He gave him food and water and revived him enough where he could walk. He led him to a village where he could recover and regain his health and strength. While he was recovering, Harry Faversham asked Abou Fatma---"Why did you help me? Why have you done so much for me?" Abou replied simply---"Because God put you in my way!"

Somewhere, there is someone needing help whom God has "has put in your way" for you to help. So you can be like Abou Fatma, like the Good Samaritan. So you can know the joy of serving Christ by helping the person He puts in your way.

So look at today's bulletin, look at the brochures on the table out in the narthex---see the ways you can be a Good Samaritan. Pray and decide what you will do. God has put people needing help in your way. Do not be like the priest and Levite and walk on by---be like the Good Samaritan. And God will bless you!