

HOMILY FOR SUNDAY NOVEMBER 23, 2014

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

GLORY BE TO JESUS CHRIST! GLORY BE FOREVER!

Have you ever noticed that in life, things are not always the way they appear to be? You know the old saying, you can't always judge a book by its cover? Today's Gospel reading definitely falls into that category.

On the surface, today's reading, which is taken from the 10th Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Luke, is quite simple and straightforward. Our Lord in answering a question from a Lawyer who was trying to test our Lord, explains to him what one must do to inherit eternal life by telling him a famous story which is universally known as the Parable of the Good Samaritan. We all know this parable, I am sure from memory having heard it read in Church year after year. The whole point of this parable, we reason, is for us to identify with the Good Samaritan. If we want to be saved, we need to be kind and compassionate like the Good Samaritan. Looking out into the congregation, I see a church filled with Good Samaritans. Our work at the Lord's Kitchen, definitely falls into the category of being a good Samaritan, no?

As I said before, things are not always the way they seem to be. This is especially true in Holy Scripture. In preparing for today's sermon, I did what I usually do, and that is I turned for guidance to the Fathers or Saints of the Church, who are much closer to the Lord than myself to see what they had to say about this Scripture passage. What they had to say was surprising. As I have explained to you in the past, when we read Holy Scripture and especially parables, we should ask our-self, who am I in the passage, how

does this apply to my life. So in reflecting on this parable, we could understandably interpret that we are supposed to identify with the Good Samaritan. While in truth we are supposed to in the words of our Lord, go and do likewise and model the behavior of the Good Samaritan, the Fathers of the Church, and the Hymns of the Church which focus on this scriptural passage point us in a surprisingly different direction. The Fathers of the Church direct us to instead identify with the man who was robbed and beaten.

The Church Fathers' interpretation is very fascinating. They interpret the man who was travelling From Jerusalem to Jericho is Adam, who represents all mankind, who did not stand firm in good and fell into sin. The Thieves are demonic powers who were jealous of the goodness and purity of Adam and Even and pushed them onto sin. The man's wounds are the consequences of sin, which makes us spiritually weak. The priest and the Levite are the law of the Old Testament, given by Moses and the priesthood of Aaron which cannot save man. The Good Samaritan is Jesus Christ , Who gave us the New Testament and the grace of God (the oil and wine in the parable) to heal our infirmities. The Inn is the Church of God, the Spiritual Hospital where we find everything we need for recovery. The innkeeper represents the Church's pastors and teachers whom God charged to take care of the Flock.

So we see, when we look to the Fathers of the Church for guidance, there is a much deeper significance to this parable than we might otherwise have thought. Here we find, once again, an illustration of what the mission of the Church is. It is a spiritual medical center, a treatment center, where when one walks into its doors, finds, peace, healing and relief from the cares of everyday life for those self-inflicted wounds, the

troubles we bring on in our own life through our bad choices and willful disobedience of God, and the wounds that we have developed by no fault of our own, but as a result of the bad choices and sin that others have committed. This is why we come to Church, not because of a moral obligation – that it is one of the 10 commandments, but because we realize we need healing. And the Church offers us physical, emotional and spiritual healing. When you are acutely sick and you let me know, I will come to the hospital or your home and anoint you with Holy Unction, the oil that is blessed and often mingled with wine, just like in the parable. The wine cleans the wound and the oil seals and protects it. So literally, this is medicine of the body. It also imparts forgiveness of sins, spiritual healing. I will then offer to hear your confession, to help remove the spiritual infection, the puss if you will from your soul, and then offer you Holy Communion to physically and spiritually nourish you which serves as a powerful healing medicine. When the acute nature of the illness, or spiritual difficulty has passed, the Church provides aftercare, to completely nurse you back to health. The Church also provides another level of treatment that is often overlooked, preventative care. As we must regularly visit our medical doctors to receive inoculations and boosters to prevent us from contracting such diseases as Mumps, Tuberculosis, Hepatitis, Chicken pox., the flu and other such diseases, so too it is essential that we regularly attend Church and participate in its life to strengthen our souls against the spiritual disease of sin. And finally, as our doctors teach us to practice wellness in our life, to watch our diet, and exercise regularly, so too the Church has a well developed wellness program, that she

teaches us to follow in our daily lives, that of daily prayer and fasting, and leading a life of personal integrity and piety.

Today's Gospel reading then, provides us much to think about. Ultimately Christ is the Good Samaritan, we are not. We are that broken man that is in need of spiritual healing. Coming to that realization is then a game changer. It changes everything. Then we see the Church for what it really is, we see its value, our need to be an active part of it, and most importantly to take advantage of what it has to offer. The church is literally a Treasury of Blessings as we pray in the O Heavenly King Prayer each day. It is rich, it is wonderful. There is no end to what it can do to help us, and make our lives better and more serene. It is multifaceted. It can help us to make those difficult life changes that we know we need to make. It can help us to discover and develop our God-Given talents. It can provide us an opportunity to help others, after we ourselves have been helped. It gives us a venue to express our gratitude to Almighty God for his Many Blessings. And when times are tough, it gives us a safe place to wrestle with God, and come to terms with the difficulties we face in life.

My prayer for today is that having been given a new perspective on this very familiar parable of the Good Samaritan, that we may better understand both the nature of the Church and our absolute need for taking part in her therapeutic treatment plan. May we indeed do what we can to support the Church and her healing ministry, so that we and all in our community who are in need can be ministered to by our Lord, the Good Samaritan, and be perfectly restored to spiritual health, so that we may enter into the joy of the never-ending kingdom of Heaven, unto the ages of ages. Amen.