

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
July 14, 2019
Fr. Rick Lorenz

Homily

Today's Gospel is centered around the parable of the Good Samaritan. The parable is well-known and well-received. It answers the question posed by the lawyer: "And who is my neighbour?" The neighbour is not the one who passes by out of fear, nor the one who steps aside out of indifference, although both of them are tied to the victim through nationality and religion. The neighbour is the one who gives himself to show mercy. The Good Samaritan loves God through the care that he provides: with a heart moved with pity, a soul that chooses mercy; with strength that carries, and a mind that plans ahead. The love comes from God, flows through the Good Samaritan to the victim, and edifies the innkeeper as well. The Good Samaritan loves God by loving his neighbour.

I would suggest that our society understands fairly well the answer to the question, "And who is my neighbour?" Where we stumble is, "How should I love my neighbour?" The right answer is, "Love your neighbour as yourself," but we don't always want what's best for ourselves, let alone choose it. We spend three seasons dreaming about summer, but just when it comes time for an evening walk, Netflix puts out a show that you have to watch. That's just a little example, and not even a sin.

Dt 30:10-14
Ps19
Col 1:15-20
Lk 10:25-37

With our fallen nature we might prefer something even worse, and then extend that to our neighbour thinking that we're showing them love.

A couple things come to mind. In France, a man named Vincent Lambert had been unresponsive for a decade. Not a life that we would choose, but precious nonetheless. It seemed merciful to relieve him of his suffering. A feeding tube that kept him alive was removed, and then he died on Thursday. In response, Pope Francis sent out a tweet: "May God the Father welcome Vincent Lambert in His arms. Let us not build a civilization that discards persons whose lives we no longer consider to be worthy of living; every life is valuable, always."

The next day, a movie called "Unplanned" began showings in Canada. Some controversy surrounds it. The Ottawa Citizen only gave it one star, but it's actually pretty good. I've seen crummy movies before, the kind that make you wish you had saved your time and money for something else, the kind that launch you on a rant. We're talking "Star Wars Episode One - The Phantom Menace." But "Unplanned" is pretty good. It's a story based on the life of Abby Johnson. She worked for Planned Parenthood, which provides "reproductive health care." It seemed merciful to unburden young women left frightened, unsupported and alone. But then she saw on an ultrasound screen what "reproductive health care" really means.

Bioethics leads us astray. Its practitioners "professionally guide the unthinkable on its passage through the debatable on its way to becoming the justifiable until it is established as unexceptional."¹ In other words, we're on a slippery slope sliding from what we know is right to what we know is wrong. How do we know? We're guided by the Word of God given to us by the Holy Spirit.

Moses said, "Obey the Lord your God by observing his commandments and decrees that are written in this book of the Law." God revealed his will to us so that we can know the truth. "Since therefore all that the inspired authors or sacred writers affirm should be regarded as affirmed by the Holy Spirit, we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture firmly, faithfully, and without error teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the Sacred Scriptures (CCC 107, DV 11)." These words are from a Vatican II document called "Dei Verbum," but the psalm puts it more simply: "The commandment of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes." To answer the question of how to love our neighbour, our own understanding is not enough: the Church receives and relies upon God's guidance to find the right path.

¹ Fr. Richard John Neuhaus, qtd. in "Of Vincent Lambert and Ethical Rubicons," First Things, 12 July 2019.