

XV ORDINARY TIME – July 10th, 2016

YOU GO AND DO LIKEWISE - Biblical Commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM

Lk 10.25-37

And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself."

And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live." But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side.

So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?"

He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

Is the divine law to be observed even when it causes human suffering?

Let's see what Luke writes in chapter 10, 25-37.

"And behold, a lawyer...".....the lawyers are the scribes, the highest of legislators. Theirs was a divine authority because their word was thought to be the same as God's. *"...stood up to put him to the test.."* literally "to tempt" him. The evangelist uses here the same word that had been used in the desert for the devil's temptation. So, the evangelist warns us, "Attention," for tradition, these zealous defenders of the doctrine, are actually the tools of the devil. And asks: *"Teacher,.."* This attitude is typical of the

curial falsehood , he turns to Jesus to tempt him, so to accuse him, and instead addresses him with this title of respect, as if he wanted to learn, but really he just wants to judge. *“Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”* Here is the subject that interests them. Jesus does not speak to them, Jesus has come to change life here, he is not interested in eternal life.

“He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” Jesus is provocative and ironic. The doctor of law is one of the leading experts. He is one, that for all his life, every day has been above the law to exploit the hidden meanings. Well, Jesus asks him *“What is written in the law ? Then with profound sarcasm: “How do you read it?”* meaning *“What do you understand?”* It is not enough to read the law, it must be understood. If the wellbeing of others is not at the first place in one’s life, the Holy Scriptures are read but not understood.

And he answered, here Deuteronomy chapter 6, 5 is quoted: *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”* Meaning the love for God is total, it absorbs all man’s energy, the love towards others is relative, love your neighbour as yourself. *“And he said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.”*

He is not speaking of eternal life, but of this life. *“But he, desiring to justify himself,...”* What does it mean to justify oneself? In the time of Jesus there was an ample debate between two rabbinic schools, Rabbi Shaman’s school, very strict and severe, and that of Rabbi Hillel, less severe, on the concept of one’s’ neighbour. For Hillel the idea of ones neighbour meant also the stranger that lived in Israel, for Shaman, a position more severe, only those of the family or at the most, the tribe. The fact that he wanted to justify himself shows that he was of a more strict position.

In fact , *“..he said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbour?”* Well, Jesus does not reply in a theological way, but with a story, a parable in which changes radically the two fundamental concepts of religion: the believers concept and the concept of neighbours.

“Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho,” Jerusalem is in the mountainous part of Judah, at 818 m above sea level, while Jericho, down in the desert is a good 258m below sea level. Between the two there are thirty kilometres, so there is a great difference in altitude. The place is arid and barren, difficult for walking.

“...and he fell among robbers,” the place was dangerous and it still is dangerous to go alone. *“..who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead.”* On that road, in that situation, in that climate, he had no hope. He must only wait to die, unless, providentially, passed some good soul. It is what Jesus gives us to understand.

. By chance... which means providentially, Jesus presents the best that could have happened, the most appropriate person. *“Now by chance a priest was going down that road,”* It is important that Jesus speaks of a priest passing. What does it mean? Jericho was a priestly city, according to their turn, they came up to the temple of Jerusalem, and through complicated purification rituals, for a week they exercised their liturgical ministry. Therefore the priest did not go to Jerusalem to be purified, but he had Therefore it could not have been better.

"..and when he saw him .." here first is the salvation, then the let down *".. he passed by on the other side."* Why? He is a cruel and insensible person. No even worse, a religious person. For a religious person the duties towards God come before those towards men. What did the lawyer say? The love for God is total, love for your neighbour is relative.

He is a priest in a pure condition and the law in the books of Leviticus and Numbers, they are forbidden to be in contact with the dead or injured, because they will become impure. So he finds himself in a dilemma whether to obey the divine law or help a person? What is more important, the "good" of God or the good of the neighbour?

The religious persons have no doubt, for them it is more important the good of God.

"So likewise a Levite," the Levites were part of the cult, they also had to be in a pure condition for the ceremonies in the temple *".. when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side."* There is no hope. And there is the final blow.

"But a Samaritan," the most terrible enemy, a horrible person, a human being disgusting to a Jew, *"..as he journeyed, came to where he was,"* and now we wait for the final blow. But Jesus says: *"..when he saw him,"* Also the priest and Levite saw him, then Jesus says something extraordinary *".. he had compassion."*

" To have compassion " was a verb reserved only for God. Only God can have compassion, because to have compassion meant to communicate life to those who do not have it. So, for Jesus this Samaritan, a heretic, sinner, an unclean person, acts like God. Who is the believer for Jesus? Not he that obeys God observing his laws – we have seen the results with the priest – but the one who resembles God by practicing love similar to his.

The Samaritan goes to him, helps this unfortunate person and even takes him to an inn to take care of him, at the end Jesus turns to the lawyer and asks him: *"Which of these three,"*(the priest, the Levite , the Samaritan) *"...do you think, proved to be a neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers?"* Jesus reversed the lawyers question. He wanted to know " who is my neighbour", meaning " How great must be my love? " Jesus asks him *"Which of these three,... proved to be a neighbour.."* meaning where does love begin?

A neighbour is the one who helps those in need.

The reply is easy, but unacceptable for the lawyer. *"He said.."* (he does not even name the Samaritan for how much is the hate) He does not accept that a man can love as God, because God is the one with compassion, mankind have mercy. And for the lawyer it is unacceptable that a man can love like God.

"The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, *"You go, and do likewise."* Therefore for Jesus the believer is not he who obeys God observing his laws, but he who practices a love similar to that of the Father.

