

XV ORDINARY TIME – July 14th, 2013

**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."***

Jesus completely changed the concept of "neighbor". In the Hebraic culture, neighbor was the addressee of love. Well, according to Jesus, he's the one who loves, so 'neighbor' is not the one whom I address my love, but it's me. So, not the one who is loved, but the one who loves.

And Luke, the evangelist describes him in a very known parable, the so called Good Samaritan. Let's comment it. "A lawyer", that is an expert, in other Gospels they are called scribes, official theologians of Israel, "stood up to...", not to put him to test, but "... tempt him". The verb is the same as that used by the evangelist for temptations of Jesus in the desert on behalf of the devil.

So, the great defender of the law, is indeed for the evangelist nothing but a tool of the devil. And he asks him "«Teacher»", here is the falsehood typical of religious people; he doesn't want to learn, but to trap and condemn him, and asks what he has to do in order to get eternal life. Jesus answers in a very detached and ironic way. Imagine that this person is one who has devoted all his existence to knowledge, reading and interpretation of scripture. Jesus asks "«What is written in the Law?»", but most important, "«How do you read it?»", that is what do you understand?

Reading the Bible is not enough, one must understand it. If one doesn't put the good of man as the first value, the Bible might be read, re-read, preached, proclaimed, but not understood at all. The lawyer answers by using what was proclaimed as the creed of Israel, from the Book of Deuteronomy, chapt. 6 and adding a precept taken from Leviticus. To the concept of loving God with all the soul, that is an absolute love, he adds a love for others which is relative "«As yourself»".

And Jesus says "«You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live». But he, desiring to justify himself...". Why does he need to justify himself? At the time of Jesus there was a great debate between the rabbinical schools about who was the neighbor. One started from a very narrow vision, "neighbor is one of my clan", to a broader one, also including those foreigners living inside Israel's borders.

The fact the lawyer wants to justify himself means that he supports the most restrictive interpretation. Here starts a wonderful parable. "«A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho»", passing from 800 meters above sea level (Jerusalem) to some meters under sea level (Jericho) – it is a very uncomfortable and difficult path and a dangerous place.

This man "«fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him leaving him half dead»". In that path, in those conditions, death is almost certain, unless someone happens there providentially. In fact, providentially – what here is translated as 'by chance' means luckily and Jesus intends to increase his listeners' attention – "«A priest was going down»", the fact he was going down is very important. Jerusalem was the city of the temple and Jericho a priestly town.

Priests went up to Jerusalem to enter into service at the temple and had to be clean all week long in order to officiate before the Lord, so we have here not a priest who goes up to Jerusalem, but coming down. He's been closely in touch with the Lord or a week, apparently nothing better could ever happen.

"«Was going down that road, and when he saw him ...»", the man is safe then. But here comes a cold shower! "«He passed by on the other side»". Why? Is he insensitive or inhuman? Not at all. Something even worst: he's a religious person, and, according to his religion, to his law,

Books of Leviticus and Numbers prevented him from touching the dead. Being a priest, he was even preventing to touch his parents' corpse.

What Jesus is highlighting is a very serious issue. Is Law to be obeyed even when causing sufferings to men? When there is conflict between divine law and the sake of man, what is the right behavior? The priest has no doubts: divine law comes first. Likewise a Levite, that is ministers of worship.

And then for the man, poor him, there's no chance. Not only there's no hope, but what else is happening? "*«A Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him ...»*", Samaritans were enemies of the Jews. Every time they met there was a quarrel. Here this Samaritan sees his enemy half dead, what will he do? He'll kill him.

Not at all, something sensational happens. "*«When he saw him, he had compassion»*". 'Having compassion' is a technical expression that indicates a divine action by which the Lord gives life to those who are lacking of it. The difference between 'compassion', a divine action, and 'have mercy', a human action, has to be noticed.

'Having compassion' appears three times in this gospel, when Jesus sees the widow of Nain's dead son, he had compassion and raised him; when the father of the Prodigal Son sees his son, he has compassion and conveys life to him. Well the one and only character whom a divine action is given, is a person considered very far from God, almost an enemy, a rival.

Jesus is answering to the question "Who is a believer? Is he the one who obeys God by observing his laws or the one who resembles to the Father, displaying a love which is similar to his same one? The answer is very clear.

*«He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine»*, he takes care of him quite as much as exaggerating, turns himself into a servant for this man. And here come the final question of Jesus, "*«Which of these three»*", *remember we have a priest, a Levite and a Samaritan, «proved to be a neighbor to the man?»*"

He asked "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus asks, instead, "Who has proven to be neighbor?" Not to whom has your love to arrive, but from whom has your love to start. The neighbor is not the one who is loved, but the one who loves. "*«Which of these three proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?»*"

What could be the answer? The Samaritan. But the lawyer avoids pronouncing the name of a horrible enemy, then says "*«The one ... »*", not willing to mean "the one who had compassion" – and here we're sorry to see the translation, which provides the expression "to show mercy", while a different Greek word is used, just meaning having compassion. He, in fact, the man of worship, does not tolerate – it is unacceptable to him – that a man can act like God.

*«And Jesus said to him, «You go, and do likewise»*".

Quale può essere la risposta? Il Samaritano, ma il dottore evita di pronunciare l'orrido nome di un nemico, allora dice «*Quello...*», non accetta di dire “*quello che ha avuto compassione*”, e dispiace qui vedere la traduzione che traduce così, il verbo greco è differente, ma dice “*chi ha avuto misericordia*”. Lui infatti, l'uomo del culto, non tollera – è inaccettabile per lui – che l'uomo possa comportarsi come Dio.

Ebbene Gesù gli dice “*«Va e anche tu fai così»*”.