

## Gospel Reflection Proper 10C

July 14, 2013

Luke 10:25-37

<sup>25</sup>Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" <sup>26</sup>He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" <sup>27</sup>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." <sup>28</sup>And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live." <sup>29</sup>But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" <sup>30</sup>Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup>Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup>So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup>But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. <sup>34</sup>He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. <sup>35</sup>The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' <sup>36</sup>Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" <sup>37</sup>He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

### Reflection

"But wanting to justify himself . . ." Now there's a familiar desire. The last time I flew the convoluted, multi-plane trip between Cincinnati and Eureka, there were delays, back-ups and cancelled flights. It was late and I was exhausted and frantic to get home because a guest was coming and I had piles of other work to catch up on as well as shopping and cooking and getting a guest room ready. My neighbor was there (Jesus' definition, not mine). He was a grandfather whose grand-daughter was getting married the next morning. I had a confirmed seat on a long-delayed flight. His flight had been cancelled. He was begging, pleading for a chance to be at his granddaughter's wedding. I could have given him my seat. I didn't. I judged my needs and commitments to be more important than his. I've been trying to justify my choice ever since. Did I pass by on the other side? Did I make the right choice because of the guest who was coming who would also be weary and in need of a warm welcome and loving hospitality? Who was my neighbor in that moment?

It's hard. Jesus doesn't lay down any clear rules about how to decide whether this person with a need is one I should respond to regardless of the inconvenience and cost to myself and others. What about that one over there? For how many homeless people should I buy a sandwich? Should I pick up a hitch-hiker in a rainstorm, even knowing the stupid risks I'm running to do so? Yet the Samaritan in Jesus' story took a huge risk. The man could have been a decoy for robbers who were waiting in ambush. It was not unusual on that road. Where does justifiable risk stop and reason start?

I so often wish that Jesus had provided a list of absolutes. Loving my neighbor as myself would be infinitely easier if I just knew which boxes to check and which to leave blank. For that matter, how did Jesus choose whom to heal, whom to take time with, whose outcries to answer?

I'm sorry I don't have any answers to offer or a better example of Christian selflessness to write about. Perhaps I can justify myself by saying that at least I struggled with the issue and thought seriously about giving my seat to the grandfather, but that doesn't quite cut it either. So for now I'll have to stay in the discomfort of uncertainty and uneasy conscience and keep my eyes open for the neighbors God might send my way today. Please, God, help me to recognize them and respond.