

11/8/19

Greetings to all the Faithful of St. Andrew's,

Christ is among us!

I would like to start this message with the following words, to which are appended no ifs ands or buts: We should consider *anyone* and *everyone* in need as our *neighbor* and we should act with hospitality and *neighborliness*, as this attitude and action conform to love, which is the greatest commandment.

Our Gospel reading this Sunday is Luke 10:25-37. This reading contains the parable of the "Good Samaritan." This individual was not a Jew, was uncircumcised, indeed he was an outsider who is presented as an example of how insiders should think and behave. Jews and Samaritans had a rocky relationship, to say the least. It is part of human nature to paint one's enemy in the worst possible light and to present oneself in a positive light, even if we have to fudge it a little bit, so to say. In this story the Lord goes out of his way to present a "bad guy" in the best possible light and to show the "good guy" that he is not good as he thought, in that he tries to circumvent God's will by rationalizing his disobedience to God's commandment. He tries to exclude certain people as "neighbors" so as to avoid his responsibility to love everyone as a neighbor. That is to say, if he can exclude certain people from the definition of who is a "neighbor," then he can justify not loving them. This man wants the outward trappings of religion but not its true content, which is obedience to God's commandment.

In keeping with the theme of obedience, the Apostle Paul teaches that those who have God's teaching and do not practice it are condemned by that teaching (Romans 2). In the Gospel reading, a man who was considered an expert in the law attempts to put Jesus to a test. In the end Jesus puts him to the test. Consider these words the Apostle Paul writes in Romans 2:26-27:

"So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? Then those who are physically uncircumcised but keep the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. For he is not a real Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical. He is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart, spiritual and not literal. His praise is not from men but from God."

To help feel the impact of this teaching, substitute "Christian" for "Jew" and "baptism" for "circumcision."

A Samaritan, an outsider, an "unbaptized" foreigner with whom the Jews "have no dealings" (John 4:9), takes care of and acts neighborly to a complete stranger, in contrast to a priest and a Levite who, after serving and worshipping God in the Temple in Jerusalem, disobeys God's Law of love (Galatians 5:14; Romans 13:9). The Samaritan is obedient and practices the teaching of mercy (Luke 10:37), and the expert in the law is told to "do" likewise.

A Christian who is truly baptized inwardly does not ask “who is my neighbor” so as to exclude certain people from receiving mercy, but rather asks how they can be a neighbor to *anyone* who is in need. The true neighbor never rejects or turns away or walks by *anyone* who is in need. This path is God’s path.

Please mark your calendar for the meeting of the Men's Fellowship on Saturday, November 17 at 10 am in the Great Hall.

Yours in Christ,
Fr. Herman