

And Who Is My Neighbor?

A Meditation for Reflection and Discussion

The theme for this year's ARG is taken from the parable of the Good Samaritan, and is the question posed to Jesus by a lawyer that prompted Jesus to tell it. Pope Francis begins his latest encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* with an extended reflection on this parable focusing on each character that appears. In this guided reflection you will try to place yourself in the story, imagining yourself as each character. If you are doing this reflection in a group, please meditate on each question silently for a moment before sharing.

The Gospel: read the original story from the gospel of Luke (out loud if in a group).

*“Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. ‘Teacher,’ he said, ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ He said to him, ‘What is written in the law? What do you read there?’ 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 given the right answer; do this, and you will live.’ But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, ‘**And who is my neighbor?**’ 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. 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 while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. 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. 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.’ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?’ He said, ‘The one who showed him mercy.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Go and do likewise.’” (Lk 10:25-37).*

Reflection Questions: Now go through the story, imagining yourself in the place of each character. Then try to move from the parable to your own life and experience ("go from gospel to life"). Ask yourself: does my life sometimes reflect the feelings and behavior of each character?

1. **The Lawyer:** Think first about the lawyer who was trying to test Jesus. What did he hope to accomplish? Why did he want to justify himself?
2. **The Traveler:** How does it feel to be attacked while alone, in a deserted place? How do you feel when the leaders of your community (in the story, the priest and Levite) ignore you and go on? Remember that Jews looked down on Samaritans as unclean and inferior. Who are your Samaritans? Can you accept help from someone you do not like?
3. **The Robbers:** Who are these robbers and what do they hope to gain? Who, in our modern world, are the robbers? Recall what C.S. Lewis said:

The greatest evil is not now done in...concentration camps and labor camps. In these we see the final result. But it is conceived and ordered...in clean, carpeted, warmed and well lighted offices, by quiet men with white collars and cut fingernails and smooth-shaven cheeks who do not need to raise their voices. (The ScrewTape Letters)

Do you have anything in common with the robbers? Remember the injunction of St. Basil the Great: "*The coat in your closet you do not wear was **stolen** from a poor man.*"

4. **The Priest and Levite:** Why did the priest and Levite pass by on the other side of the road? Did they think they were too important to help? Or are they afraid to help? Who do we pass by in our lives? What do we pretend we do not see, or look at and think that there is nothing you can do? Pope Francis wrote

"Robbers" usually find secret allies in those who "pass by and look the other way". There is a certain interplay between those who manipulate and cheat society, and those who, while claiming to be detached and impartial critics, live off that system and its benefits. (Fratelli Tutti, 75)

In what ways do we cooperate with the "robbers", accepting grave injustice because we benefit in some way?

5. **Interlude:** If you have access to the internet, watch this video from the children's series *VeggieTales*, which brings the priest and Levite to life in song.

https://youtu.be/a_tSd8qsw0E

6. **The Samaritan:** Why does the Samaritan stop and help? How is this similar to and different from St. Francis embracing the leper? Remember that the Samaritan is despised by the Jews. Would you stop to help someone who hated you? What if they were ungrateful and still treated you badly afterwards?

7. **Final Reflection:** After Jesus tells the story he asks the lawyer to identify who was the neighbor to the traveler. Who is your neighbor? Or rather, turn this question around: who is **not** your neighbor? What person, what group of people, do not have the right to ask for your sacrificial love and mercy?

Knowing that we have all failed at times to love and serve our neighbors, how can we make amends going forward? If you can, watch this clip from the movie *Gandhi*. In this scene, terrible riots between Hindus and Muslims have broken out, with much violence. Gandhi has been fasting, threatening to starve himself to death if the fighting did not stop. As the clip begins, leaders of the Hindu mobs have come to see him.

<https://youtu.be/PXtZytG9EA4>