

A title for this homily could be the dilemma of the parable of the Good Samaritan for us today.

While I begin with an anecdote, it is what happened subsequently that highlights the dilemma.

In March I was walking in the Mall in Frankston. I was not in clerical dress so the two men sitting on a bench would not know I am a priest. As I came near them one rose and asked if I had two dollars. "No. What do you want that for?" "To buy some food." "Why not go to the food bank, or an emergency relief?" "They're closed." "Well, you should have got up earlier." I don't recall the rest of the conversation but I gave them two one dollar coins. "Here you are. Don't drink or drug them." I walked on home.

I will come back to parts of that conversation. As I walked home I thought of the problems of helping people in that way. They didn't look as though they had not eaten. They were probably in their thirties and more worldly wise than I am. As a rural parish priest who had people call to ask for help, I had learned that it is easy to be taken for granted and that people have an expectation about the Church, about Christians that amounts to "I want; you give." I'm not sure that is what Jesus always did. Read some of the challenges he gave to people.

In my encounter I could have said "No" and walked on. However, they may have had a serious need. In France, I saw my mother-in-law give a beggar some money. She explained that in England they have social security. In France there is nothing. Yet, as my anecdote shows, there are channels of help in our community. Some people only want money.

Nevertheless, some of my conversation could smack of the attitudes of the priest and the Levite in the parable of Jesus. It is a kind of passing by on the other side. Both the priest and Levite were of some position in society. The priest was probably keeping himself ritually clean. That did not apply to me. The Levite, possibly had some cultus responsibility, but he might have had wine and oil to use. As a priest, I know the importance of trying to live out the gospel. It is for everyone who calls themselves 'Christian.' John in his first letter writes, "How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?" (1 Jn 3:17) We could debate what is meant by "the world's goods", but that is not the issue. We recognize God's love is for all and if we can help someone we ought to do.

The walk home thinking about all of this is not meant to justify myself. It is a dilemma we face in our society. Recently the police in Melbourne arrested a number of people with begging bowls who were on tourist visas. It

does not encourage us to help people who may have a genuine need.

The evening of my anecdote, at Evening Prayer, the second reading was this gospel story of the Good Samaritan. As I thought about it and thought of my experience in the afternoon, I realized something in a new way. The Samaritan helped a "half dead" man. We say that is the reason the religious people didn't help. Jesus condemned that attitude. We are unlikely to meet half dead people along the road, although it is known. Yet that puts the Good Samaritan story into a particular context. It is more than helping the elderly person across the road, or passing on some children's clothes to a young family down the street, even if both acts are kind, especially if the people are very different from us. Jesus made the helper a hated Samaritan. What a shock for his Jewish listeners. However, a half dead person who may do nothing more than groan is very different from a fairly fit looking thirty something man asking for two dollars.

The danger now may be that we think it is only half dead people we have to help. They may not be as rare we would like to think in our society but it will be trained people who will most often meet that situation. Remember the original question that led Jesus to give this parable. A lawyer, who obviously knew his scriptures, asked the question, "Who is my neighbour?" Jesus teaches us that our neighbour is everyone. It is

those who are here, those in our street, those in the community as a whole and those who have a need elsewhere.

We must work through the questions that each appeal may raise. It is neither to justify any help we give nor to find some reason or maybe at times, more truthfully, some excuse for not giving aid to someone.

A long way from a half dead Jew being helped by a Samaritan, or two chaps asking for two dollars, the Missions to Seafarers is a challenge to being a good person for the sake of humanity redeemed in Christ Jesus.

Today is Sea Sunday. We pray for the Mission to Seafarers. The Mission, the Flying Angel, is not concerned with turning sailors into Christians. It is concerned to provide a base for the hundreds of sailors from many cultures who, for a short few hours, are able to be ashore. The reports of Seafarers Mission mention sailors of all ages need support for fresh clothes, help to make contact with home, counsel for unpaid wages, and many other issues. This might be a way we apply the Good Samaritan parable.

The Mission to Seafarers office in Melbourne is in Flinders Street, Docklands. In most ports the office provides those things that our modern world needs. There are computers linked to the internet, telephone

cards and batteries for telephones. There are magazines and clothes for the taking. One rural community produced over forty beanies, just because the local congregation started knitting them and a parishioner mentioned her effort at a local craft group.

Who do they help? Seafarers come from China, the Philippines, Africa, the Arab countries and South Americas. They bring to us things we cannot produce or sadly, no longer manufacture. They are young men and not so young. They speak a multitude of languages. They are Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Taoist and nothing at all in religion. These people are, in the word of Jesus in the parable, neighbours.

Who serves in the mission of the Flying Angel? There are chaplains, sometimes paid sometimes part time. The Mission has a chapel and there are services to which sometimes men from other lands will go. There are good hearted Christian people who do different tasks and sometimes they are people who have that gift of gossiping the gospel. Yet both the seamen and the Mission staff learn they are neighbours. Is it a trite way to express the parable of the Good Samaritan in our time? Possibly it is. Yet it cost the Good Samaritan and however we see being a Good Samaritan, it costs us.

Year B

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