

A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves.

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Yesterday was the feast day of Mother Teresa, the great popular modern saint who is famous for having said, *I would rather make mistakes in kindness and compassion than work miracles in unkindness and hardness*. Mother Teresa spent her life serving the sick and dying, saying to everyone that she saw the face of Jesus in each sick and dying person she helped, in each person that the world left in its gutters for dead. Mother Teresa lived a courageous and heroic life, she is a shining example of the *Good Samaritan*, full of the Christian virtue of compassion, spending all of her resources and energy in showing kindness and mercy to the needy. For this reason, the Church and even the popular culture hold her up as an example to us all.

*I would rather make mistakes in kindness and compassion than work miracles in unkindness and hardness*. The very example of unkindness and hardness are found in the priest and levite from today's Gospel. They come upon a man robbed and beaten, left for dead, but they pass him by. The poor man could very well have been a Jew himself. If this is the case, then the passers-by were not even interested in helping one of their own people. We do not even know if they glanced back on their way and hoped that someone else would come along and help the poor fellow. These men are completely indifferent. How could they come across a man left for dead and leave him there in the middle of the road? And they being *Levites* knew the commandments of God and were ministers of God's Covenant to the people. But, evidently, they had better places to be, namely the Temple. The road they are on goes from Jerusalem through Jericho and goes all the way around Samaria. Remember, the Samaritans are a people who were little better than dogs to the ancient Jews. The *Priest* and the *Levite* probably did not want even to be seen on the road. After all, this man had been mugged and they could be mugged too. It was not the road one wanted to linger about or stop on. We have probably driven down a similar road and locked our car doors before coming to a stop.

There was another issue for the *Priest* and *Levite* though, if they stopped and helped the man and touched him. We assume the man was covered in blood and dirt, or even worse, dead, and thus this would have made him ritually unclean. By helping this poor man, they would have polluted themselves on the way to the Temple. They would have needed at least a week's worth of purification rituals, which means they would have had to sacrifice their livelihood for the rest of the week. For these two Temple officials, this poor man was not worth a week's wages,

not even two pence. The Priest and Levite prided themselves on having had true religion and yet instead we see that they revealed their hypocrisy. The *Priest* and *Levite* had learned as children what the Law expected of them, *love thy neighbor as thyself*, and *If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother...Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land.* They knew the Law, but they knew the consequences if they stopped to help the poor man. They judged the man not worthy of the trouble, not worthy of God's Law, and so they went on their way.

Finally the *Samaritan*, the stranger comes along. His interpretation of the Law of Moses and the Commandments has been at odds with the Jews for centuries. They followed a different interpretation of Scripture. And yet it is the *Samaritan* who was not afraid of sacrificing ritual purity on a bloodied man in the middle of the road. The Samaritan may have disagreed with the *Levites* on the finer points of the Law, but what is most important is that he had compassion upon the man left *half-dead on the side of the road*. The Samaritan did not ask the man if he was a Jew or Gentile, for regardless, he would spare no cost to ensure his rescue. The Samaritan bound up his wounds with strips of cloth, pouring in wine and oil - costly items in the *Samaritan's* day. He placed the man on his own beast, brought him to an inn, and paid two pence to the inn keeper, half a week's wage, saying *take care of him, and whatever else you spend on him I will repay when I return.*

That neighbor which the Jews had avoided for centuries, who they looked down upon, turned out to be the better neighbor to the poor man. The Good Samaritan *would rather make mistakes in kindness and compassion*, while the *Priest* and *Levite* refused to *work miracles in unkindness and hardness*. And Jesus holds the Good Samaritan up to the Scribe as an example for them all to learn from. Imagine how they must have despised Jesus for telling them to go and imitate a *Samaritan*! It would have been better for them to be more like those Samaritans that they despised so much. Yet their interpretation of the Law gave them no such allowances. It is only with the coming of Jesus Christ, that the veil of the Law would be lifted so that we could come to understand the true nature of righteousness through the Christian virtues. It is only with Jesus Christ that we can understand that the risk of being compassionate is worth more than anything that it might cost in earthly treasure.

Jesus tells us to go and be like the *Good Samaritan*, because He, Jesus Christ, is the *Good Samaritan*. He is the stranger that *came unto His own and His own received Him not*. We are the poor man attacked by robbers on our way in this world after having been left by the *Priest and Levite* of the Old Law that can only ever pass us by. Only until Jesus comes and binds up the wounds of our sins, and pours his *wine and oil* into us, and takes us to *His inn* -the Church, that we can begin to be restored. It is only until we have made it to the *inn* and the Lord has paid our way that we can be saved. Jesus expects us to be like the *Good Samaritan*, to imitate Him and show compassion to others because God has shown compassion to us.

*Go, and do thou likewise*. Go and imitate Jesus, imitate Mother Teresa. In light of this Gospel, Mother Teresa's vocation does not seem all that extraordinary does it? She is only doing what we are all called to do, some to greater lengths than others. How can Mother Teresa say, *I would rather make mistakes in kindness and compassion, than to work miracles in unkindness and hardness?* She knew that the *Priest and Levites* could not accept Jesus' teaching and, thus, could not show some compassion to the sick and dying because they are considered to be *lost causes*. She understood that to have True Religion but no compassion was hardly religion at all, and certainly not a religion that could save us. Mother Teresa's mission was the mission of the Lord, of the *Good Samaritan*, of the *inn*, and the *inn keeper*, and this is our mission. Our mission and calling in life are to receive the True Religion of Jesus Christ into our hearts and souls. Jesus calls us to be compassionate, Jesus desires us to help Him take up all the broken and wounded. He wants to bind up all of our wounds, to wash us all in the water of baptism, to anoint us all with the oil of gladness, the wine of His Blood, and to bring everyone into His Church. God tells us that He *desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the Truth*. We must go and be as the *Good Samaritan*, only then can we be true neighbors, only then we may follow the Lord's command to go and do likewise. Amen.