

Sermon for the Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity, August 29, 2021, at St. Peter's, Cypress, Texas
Text: Luke 10: 25, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

C. S. Lewis once said that "if you read history, you will find out that the Christians who did the most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next." The lawyer, thinking of the next world, asks Jesus, "what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" What can I do to get to heaven? Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan, the story of a reckless traveller on the infamous road to Jericho, a road known for its dangers. There are shocking aspects to this parable, for those who first heard it, and for us. It does not fall within our comfort zone. Innocent blood was shed on the road to Jericho. And then, the love of God has shocking aspects as it enters our warped world. For one thing, the traveller had no one to blame but himself for the trouble he met. And then there is a surprising minister of mercy — a Samaritan — who arrives to rescue him from his plight. Jesus tells the lawyer to be like the Samaritan. But we don't live like the Good Samaritan all the time. We're lucky if we live that way some of the time. So how are we going to get to heaven? What can we do to inherit eternal life?

Nothing. Eternal life, salvation and forgiveness are gifts. They are things God gives us because He loves us. We don't have to earn them, because we cannot possibly earn them. God gives them to us freely. There is nothing we can do to make God give us eternal life, but God offers it to us, and all we have to do is accept it. That's the theme of today's Epistle.

This new life in the new creation begins in Baptism, when we are grafted into Christ's own life. And because Christ lives forever, so do we. We live in Him now, and He lives in us. And when a farmer grafts a

branch onto a tree, he binds it up with string and seals it, with tar or silicone spray, to keep the sap in, and the germs out. Baptism is the graft, and Confirmation is the seal, to keep you firmed up in the new life that is constantly poured into us by the Holy Spirit.

We cannot earn heaven by acting like the Good Samaritan. The example of the Good Samaritan does not tell us how to earn eternal life. It tells us how to act after we know we have eternal life. God loves you no matter what. You can say yes to His love and get on with the business of how to act accordingly.

We inherit all that Jesus is and has, now that we are grafted and sealed into His indestructible life, a new life that goes on forever, and keeps getting richer and better forever...like peeling an onion that gets bigger as we peel it! As we come to realize how great this is, we want to start living that way now. We are to act like the Good Samaritan because we are grateful God has given us heaven. This Eucharist is our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving for all the Father has given us through His Son, in the Holy Spirit.

God gave the Law to Moses and it tells how people live when they are grateful of their salvation. If you could fulfill the Law you would be perfectly grateful. Only Jesus can fulfill the Law, and only Jesus can tell the parable of the Good Samaritan. We cannot imagine this parable on the lips of anyone but Jesus. His followers through the ages have used this parable to found works of mercy, hospitals, monasteries and convents offering hospitality, special schools of all kinds, and ministries of every description for every conceivable human need, even AAA for today's travellers.

The parable overflows with wisdom at so many levels. Sometimes we stumble because we're asking the wrong question. When the Gospel is sung at Mass, notice how questions are inflected differently, to call attention to them. There is, for example, in today's Gospel, an instance of our Lord changing the question, changing the frame of reference: do not just ask, "who is my neighbor?" but "to whom can I be a neighbor?" Ask not just, "How can a good God allow so much suffering in the world," but also "How does God provide for so much good, so much grace?" How does God intervene when a man travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho falls among thieves?

Our Lord teaches us, with all the prophets before Him, that history is a moral arena, a moral order. History is not based on conflicts between classes, races or sexes. History is based on moral choices, decisions we make concerning right and wrong, virtue and vice, good and bad. The traveller who fell among thieves was not attacked for race, class or gender considerations. He was attacked because the men who set upon him were vicious and murderous thieves.

True, the traveller on the dangerous road was reckless. He was not being watchful. He could have armed himself and travelled with someone. There is safety in numbers, and carrying weapons. In our prayer lives, which is the whole of our lives, we are to watch. Jesus says, "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." The Fathers expanded on watchfulness and called it attention, or sobriety, or guarding the heart, guarding the inner pastures, guarding the virtues we have harvested, to watch for stirrings of the passions...to cut them off the instant they arise. This is all part of "defense" in the spiritual life. "Watch and pray." Prayer is the offense, going out to God, calling upon

Jesus, letting God go out to us. The Fathers are fond of saying, "With the Name of Jesus, flog the foes."

God intervenes in the plight of the foolhardy traveller on the bloody road to Jericho. The Good Samaritan comes along. God is active in all our affairs, to write straight with crooked lines, to bring greater good out of evil, than if the evil had never occurred. The least likely person, the Samaritan, intervenes, to further God's purpose. God is working His purposes out in our lives, and in the world around us. He is acting in our history, to draw us to Himself, to give us Himself to us in this Holy Communion, lifting us up to sup with Him at His Table, in His Kingdom. When we sing the Sanctus, we are hearing and seeing Heaven. "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Put your hand in the Lord's, and let Him take you there. His Blood has opened up the way to the Throne of Grace. And from His Altar-throne, the Cross, we hear the life-changing words, the only real news in the universe, "I love you." He says, "I do not love you for what you are; you are because I love you." When we kneel before the Cross we can to process a little more of this staggering reality, and look at Jesus, and let Him look at me.