

The Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time July 10, 2022

Jesus' message is simple. We have received love and mercy from God. We must now share that love and mercy freely with others. If we truly love God then we will love our neighbor. And there is no one who is not our neighbor, no one whom we may not love.

One of the church's great saints - Saint Augustine - had a unique way of explaining Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan that really brings out this message. We have received mercy and we are called to give mercy.

Saint Augustine explained that the man who fell in with robbers is you and me. We have been beaten and robbed on so many levels. Many of us have been robbed of the innocence of our youth by abuse and bullying. Some of us have literally been robbed by people who cheated us and treated us unfairly. And there are many more of us who have suffered because of the sinful actions we have chosen. We have been robbed of relationships, our health, and of a peaceful life because of bad choices we've made. Sometimes these hurts are the worst of all because we've done them to ourselves. Each of us, at one point or another in our lives, has been that man lying on the side of the road, with no one to help him.

The people who pass by on the road are those who could've helped us but didn't. Maybe it was our parents who had their own problems and didn't realize what we were going through. Maybe they were teachers and priests who couldn't look past our unruly behavior and see that we were hurting. When we needed compassion and empathy, they looked down on us and judged us. Maybe they were people we turned to for help but who just took

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advantage of us and kicked us when we were down. At one point or another, all of us know what it is like to have no one around to help us. And, worse still, we know what it's like to have people walk by and not care enough to help.

The Good Samaritan is Jesus. He comes to us when we have hit rock bottom. When we have exhausted all our options and have nowhere else to turn, He stoops down to pick us up, to take care of us, and to bring us back to life.

It could be that there are some of you here who feel like that man left for dead at the side of the road. You might feel rejected and abandoned, that nobody cares, and that you are invisible. You may think that you are out of options. But there is hope. Jesus is reaching out His hand to you. He wants to lift you up and carry you to where you need to go. Open your heart, let Him in, and He will begin to heal you. As we prayed together in today's Responsorial Psalm, "Turn to the Lord in your need, and you will live." The journey of healing and transformation can be long. But Jesus will never abandon you. Even when you lose your way, He will find you again.

In Jesus' parable, the Good Samaritan pours oil and wine into the victim's wounds and bandages them up. Saint Augustine explains that the oil and wine represent the Sacraments that Jesus has given us for our healing. The first sacrament is Baptism. It washes away our sins and brings us into the family of God. Then, the Sacrament of Confession also is a way that Jesus heals us by showing us His mercy when we have sinned. In Holy

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Communion, Jesus gives us His Body and Blood to strengthen and nourish us on our journey to healing and holiness. When we are broken and battered-when we are weighed down with guilt and shame-we can find forgiveness in the Sacrament of Penance and our friendship with Jesus restored by receiving Him in the Eucharist. By receiving these sacraments frequently, our wounds are bandaged up and our health is restored.

Then the Good Samaritan brings the man to an inn where he leaves him in the care of the innkeeper. Saint Augustine said that the inn represents the Church and the innkeeper represents the people of the Church who are meant to take care of the poor, the wounded, and the needy. Pope Francis echoes this idea when he says that the Church is a field hospital where each of us are called "to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful."

These are beautiful images of what it means for us to be the baptized People of God. We are meant to be a place where people can find refreshment and relief in a world that is constantly beating us down. In the midst of a society that tells us that only the rich and powerful matter, we discover in this sacred space that we are loved unconditionally by the God who created us. When we are told that we are worthless and that we have ruined our lives by our bad behavior, we learn that there is no sin that cannot be forgiven and no person who doesn't matter. Here we find a place where we belong - no matter who we are, no matter what we have done, no matter how bruised we are. Here, in the presence of the Risen Lord, we find healing.

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Sometimes we can get so caught up in the demands of daily life that we lose sight of the needy people around us. We can be like the priest and Levite in the parable who fail to help because we are so focused on everything except what is most important - that we love one another. When that happens, let us remember who we once were because of our sinfulness and who we have become because of God's love and mercy. Then we can reach out to others with empathy and compassion rather than with judgment and indifference.