



EIGHTH SUNDAY OF LUKE

November 12

THE GOSPEL READING

Luke 10:25-37

[The Good Samaritan]

At that time, a lawyer stood up to put Jesus to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? How do you read?" And 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 answered right; do this, and you will live."

But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed, 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, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion, and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed mercy on him." And Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."



GREEK ORTHODOX
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DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

THE SERMON

This Gospel passage includes the famous “Parable of the Good Samaritan,” and it contains the most important question that could ever be asked. “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” No other question is more fundamental to our condition in a fallen world. It is another way of asking, “What is the Gospel?” A scholar who was an expert in the Law of Moses (here, called a “lawyer”) asked the question. The answer, of course, is found in Jesus Christ. He is the Son of God, and even though we are sinners, He loves us. He has come down to us, and He gave Himself to heal us and restore us to eternal life.

To answer the Biblical scholar’s question, Christ starts with the teaching found in the Old Testament: “What is written in the Law?” Christ asks. The answer summarizes the two central teachings of the Mosaic Law: that one must love God with one’s entire being and love one’s neighbor as himself. At this point, Christ allows the lawyer to follow up with the question of who our neighbor is. This is important because it becomes the focus of Jesus’ teaching in this passage.

Jesus then tells a parable with a vivid story that includes many common elements in first-century Palestine. The road from Jerusalem to Jericho (still there today) was notoriously filled with robbers because it was a deserted road. A man who is traveling there is beaten and robbed. Two religious leaders, a Priest and a Levite, pass by and ignore him, but a Samaritan takes care of him. As the Church Fathers explain, these elements symbolize the spiritual realities that speak of Christ and our human condition.

The Samaritans were an ethnic and religious group considered by the Jewish people as enemies and as religiously unclean. This hostility was deeply rooted in the history of the Old Testament when the Kingdom of Israel was divided in the 10th century BC. However, as the Lord Jesus emphasizes in the parable, it is the Samaritan who helped the Jewish man, who was half dead on the ground. The Samaritan was moved with compassion, so he took care of the man’s wounds and took him to the Inn, that is, a lodge. There, the Samaritan provided for the wounded man’s healing process and paid the innkeeper for ongoing care until he returned.

The Samaritan represents Christ. The man who was beaten and robbed is nameless because he represents all humanity (in Greek, *άνθρωπος*). As the Fathers see it, this becomes a symbol of humanity’s journey from Paradise to the fallen world and points to the Lord’s own journey in coming down to us in His Incarnation. As we read in the New Testament, the Son of God came to us and humbled Himself to the point of dying on the Cross. He did so to help and heal us when we were in our deepest need. The Lord came to save us when sin had beaten and robbed us, leaving us half-dead. The love of God came to us in Christ, and He does not pass by or ignore us in our pain.

The Good Samaritan used wine and oil to treat the man’s wounds. Wine and oil

were commonly used for that purpose at that time to soften and sterilize wounds. This points to the Holy Sacraments, especially the anointing in Holy Baptism and Holy Unction, and the Body and Blood of Christ in the Holy Eucharist. The Greek word for oil (έλαιον) is related to the word for mercy (in Greek: ἔλεος). As the Samaritan rescued the man, the Lord heals our wounds and takes us to the Inn to heal there, representing the Church. Saint John Chrysostom says, "The Inn is the Church, which receives travelers, who are tired with their journey through the world, and oppressed with the load of their sins; where the wearied traveler casting down the burden of his sins is relieved, and after being refreshed is restored with wholesome food."

The Lord rescues us from sin and death and places us in His Church, among His people, where the Holy Sacraments are given. In the Church, we worship God, and He gives us His grace to illumine, purify, and unite us to Him. He fills our hearts with His love and peace. He restores us from brokenness into wholeness. He transforms us into His likeness. The Lord is always with us, and yet He promises that He will come back again on the Last Day to restore all things, to establish His eternal kingdom, on that day that will never end.

In the meantime, symbolically, He gives "two denarii" to the Church, which symbolizes the gifts and talents so that we can bless and serve one another. It is in the power of the Holy Spirit that the Lord gives gifts and talents to each of us in the Church. He enables us in that way to serve the Church and one another, so we can grow in the likeness of Christ and edify His Church.

Our neighbor is every human being. The true neighbor is the one who shows mercy to others in concrete ways because the true neighbor loves others. By loving others, we love God. We are all neighbors to one another, which becomes particularly needful to recognize when encountering people who seem very different from us. The Jewish people and the Samaritans were very different. We encounter people from other races, social conditions, countries, languages, cultures, worldviews, and even religions. The Samaritan in the parable was marginalized and disdained by the very people whom he loved and helped.

Christ is the One who heals us in the Holy Spirit, through His love and compassion. In the Church, that is, God's "Inn," we are healed through the Holy Sacraments. Holy Baptism gives us new life. The Holy Unction oil is applied for the healing of soul and body and for the forgiveness of sins. Holy Communion is true food and true drink that restores us and gives us eternal life. As the Church Fathers say, Holy Communion is "the medicine of immortality."

God is compassionate and He acts through the Church. We are the Church, so we carry on God's charitable acts through our faith and practice. We become like Christ when we serve others. We provide for their material needs, and we protect the weak. We care for people experiencing poverty and provide for their healing and restoration, of the body and of the soul. We love our neighbors by making ourselves close to others. The

neighbor is the one who shows mercy and helps, as well as the one who receives mercy and help.

To *truly* love God is to love *all* people, even enemies, no matter how different they might be from us. To imitate Christ is to go to others, bandage their wounds, pour wine and oil on them, and carry their burdens. This means showing kindness and caring for those in need, whoever they may be. It means removing cultural, racial, gender, and religious barriers to reach out to others and provide healing when needed. In this way, we imitate Christ. In the Church, we are healed. He shows mercy to us because of His goodness, while we show mercy to one another because of God's goodness given to us. He has compassion for us so that we may enjoy Him thoroughly, while we have compassion for others so we can become like Him. This is the answer to the most important question. This is the inheritance of eternal life.