

Fifteenth Sunday Per Annum (C)

July 10, 2016. *Take care of him and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.* (Lk. 10:35).

The parable of the Good Samaritan ends with a command: *'Go and do likewise'*. It begins however, with a question: *'And who is my neighbour?'* Our Lord answers this question by means of this parable, all the while alluding to the strained relations between Samaritans and Jews. Our Lord expands the definition of neighbour and this definition is not limited by the bounds of nationality or race. This parable may be very clearly understood at the moral level as a lesson in morality: we are bound to do good to all, without distinction; and I believe that we can honestly say that we are doing this and that we endeavour to do this. The Church is clearly at the service of humanity. Our extensive networks of institutions dedicated to the wellbeing of humanity speak for themselves.

At the theological level, that is, at the level of spiritual realities, by means of an allegory this parable summarizes the whole mystery of salvation. This is the interpretation of St. Ambrose, St. Augustine and St. Jerome: The good Samaritan is Jesus. The man who has fallen into the hands of thieves represents human nature subjugated by the devil. Neither the law nor the prophets can help. Only the Saviour can heal the spiritual wound of humanity. The inn is the Church; the oil and wine poured on the wounds are the sacraments. *'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever you spend.'* Our Lord will return and reward our goodness. Individually and collectively we are the innkeeper. This interpretation of the parable helps us to appreciate its meaning beyond its very obvious moral implications. This interpretation of the parable speaks to the spiritual wounds of humanity which, if untreated, are the source not only of physical or material ills but also of even more destructive spiritual ills.

This Year of Mercy with its focus on the works of mercy, both corporal and spiritual, is a reminder to us that our understanding of the human person as created by God encompasses spiritual realities that are no less in need of nourishment than our bodies. Our souls thirst for the living God. This is how we have been constituted by our Heavenly Father. The soul created in God's image is a spiritual reality that seeks its own fulfillment, just as our bodies require and are satisfied with good food, rest, exercise and so on. St. Augustine says that *God thirsts to be thirsted for*. This does not mean that God needs us, but because He is love and mercy God desires to give and to share life. God's thirst helps us to understand man's thirst. The mystery of St Augustine's insight reveals a truth about us, about the human person. Man also thirsts; for meaning, purpose, for justice, and ultimately, this thirst can only be satisfied by God – even if in our confusion we try to satisfy this yearning with other things, like money or power or pleasure.

Our souls thirst for God and our Scriptures reveal this truth. In the course of time the symbolic union between physical thirst and spiritual thirst became so rooted in the Hebrew mind that in Hebrew the word *nefesh* can mean both *thirst* and *soul*. So the concept of soul in the Hebrew mind implies *thirst*. Thus the Psalms present us with an understanding of the human person as a living thirst for God. So the Psalmist declares: *As the deer yearns for flowing streams, so my soul longs for thee, O God* (Ps. 42). And, *O God, thou art my God, I seek thee, my soul thirsts for thee; my flesh faints for thee, as in a dry*

and weary land where there is no water (Ps. 63). And, *I stretch out my hands to thee, my soul thirsts for thee, like a parched land* (Ps. 143:6).

Years ago, I was on retreat at the Trappist monastery of Oka in Quebec and during one of the hours of the Divine Office as we stood in silence in the choir stalls, while facing the altar, I heard an elderly monk standing in front of me whisper, *Mon ame a soif. My soul is thirsty*. These words affirm an anthropological truth. We need God. This is why one can speak of the *gods of atheism*. Humans are fundamentally and essentially religious, self-transcendent. By force of necessity we need something to believe in; and so atheism too has its gods: communism, fascism, Nazism, materialism, environmentalism. But these can never satisfy. Indeed, because they deny God altogether or His primacy of place, they are ultimately destructive of persons.

The Church's mission as it concerns the development of the human person individually and even collectively is to satisfy our inherent thirst for the living God. Our Lord Himself declared: *Man does not live on bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God* (Mt. 4:4). In Himself, Our Lord reveals and unites these two dimensions of our human thirst for God and His thirst for us. *God thirsts to be thirsted for*. On the Cross, in His agony Our Lord cried out, *I thirst*; *'Sitio'*. Last Sunday, I spoke briefly of the Sisters Adorers of the Precious Blood, the first contemplative community founded in Canada by the Venerable Mother Catherine Aurelie of the Precious Blood. This Institute was the fruit of her response to Our Lord's cry from the cross. In what is known as *The Sitio*, her legacy to her daughters, she wrote: *The mysterious Sitio which the Divine Crucified One made resound from the height of His cross has found an echo in my poor heart. I have meditated on it, I have relished it, I have understood it, and I, in turn, have cried out in burning ecstasy: 'I thirst'*. It is possible that, in imitation of Our Saviour by means of prayer, deep personal prayer, we also can unite these two dimensions of God's thirst for us and our thirst for Him. Through a life of devout humility and of reverent worship, through prayer and penance for those who do not yet know the salvation of God and for those who are indifferent to what God has done for us in Christ Our Lord, we can develop and deepen in ourselves the spirit of reparation that seeks to bring healing to a suffering humanity. We can love, we can adore and repair. We can restore and heal. This is the mission that we all share in the inn that is the Church. Here in the worship of the living God in Christ we savour God Himself as the most beautiful reality of human existence. Here, if we are properly disposed, our hearts are opened to universal love; that is, to the love of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, who loves all men and desires only their salvation. In the attention that we give to these spiritual realities, we thereby manifest the primacy of the spiritual in our lives and with Our Eucharistic Lord we unite the two dimensions of this thirst *for* God and *of* God. In heeding Our Lord's invitation we satiate not only our thirst but also learn to serve the world in the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, and to make intercession and reparation for those who do not yet know the salvation of God and for the indifferent. *'Take care of him – that is, care for this humanity destined for grace and glory but too often weakened and confused by sin – take care of him and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.'* (Lk. 10:35).

The Sitio of Mother Catherine Aurelie of the Precious Blood:
<http://www.pbsisters.on.ca/files/pbsisters/The%20Sitio.pdf>