

Who Is My Neighbor?

My Brothers and Sisters in the Risen Lord,

It's a question that has echoed through time: "Who is my neighbor?" Perhaps you've asked a similar one yourself, though in different words. Maybe it comes when we see someone struggling on a street corner or hear of a tragedy in a distant place. Our instinct might be to look away, to justify our distance, or to ask, as the lawyer did in today's Gospel, "Does this really concern me?"

In Luke 10, a lawyer poses this question to Jesus, not from curiosity, but as a way to limit the demands of love. If "neighbor" can be defined narrowly—maybe just close friends, family, or those who share my beliefs—then I don't have to stretch myself. But Jesus doesn't answer with a definition. He answers with a story.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan is one of the most famous teachings of Jesus, and yet its challenge is still radical. A man is left beaten on the side of the road. Two respected religious figures—a priest and a Levite—see him and walk away. Maybe they're afraid. Maybe they're busy. Maybe they've convinced themselves that this stranger doesn't fall under the category of "neighbor." Then, along comes a Samaritan. An outsider. Someone from a group despised by the Jewish people. And yet, he's the one who stops, binds the man's wounds, and goes out of his way to ensure the man's recovery.

Jesus turns the question on its head. It's not "Who is my neighbor?" but rather, "Am I being a neighbor?" The Samaritan didn't ask the wounded man where he was from or what he believed. He simply saw someone in need and responded with compassion. In our own lives, how often do we hesitate to help because the person in need doesn't fit our definition of neighbor? Maybe it's someone who disagrees with us politically, someone from a different faith, or someone whose life choices we don't understand. The parable breaks down all those boundaries. It insists that the love God calls us to is not selective or convenient. It is sacrificial. It is inconvenient. It is universal.

And Jesus ends the story not with a suggestion but a command: "Go and do likewise." The Gospel is not just something we hear. It's something we live. Each day, we pass by people in need—not just those lying in the road but those broken in spirit, those wounded by loneliness, by fear, by poverty, by rejection. Will we stop? Will we be moved with compassion?

Saint Vincent de Paul, who spent his life in service of the poor and forgotten, said it best: "We should strive to keep our hearts open to the sufferings and wretchedness of others and pray, continually, that God may grant us that spirit of compassion which is truly the Spirit of God."

Will you go and do likewise?

Yours in Christ,
Fr. Rudy