

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Father Scarcella

Everybody likes to make a great deal- strike a real bargain- and the Jews were no exception. They have a word *metsieh*, a real find. 'what a metieh I made in the stock market'.

And their covenant with the great loving God and Father, Yahweh, was just such a metsieh. " I am your God- you are my people". And this was captured in the Sinai Covenant- the 10 Commandments. And devout Jews fought so highly and still do about this great Covenant that they carve them on small pieces of bronze called Mazuzes, that they attach to the entrance of their homes and kiss on the way in and out.

The Pharisees wrote out the message of the Covenant on small pieces of paper and put them in little leather boxes they wore on their wrists called Phylacteries to have the promise of the Covenant close at hand as it were. Over the history of Israel before Jesus the Covenant came to be examined and expanded- and commentaries on it were massive. Torah- law, Talmud-commentary. There was in time a reaction- a desire for brevity and one of the favorite subjects for learned discussions was this: how would you sum up the whole law and the Prophets? What's your capsule summary of Yahweh's Covenant with us? So the scene opens in today's Gospel "Rabbi- Teacher- Jesus" – let me have your summary, so you see- a theoretical question. But for Jesus, religion was anything but a series of theoretical questions and speculations, however interesting. Jesus says something very interesting in reply- indeed revolutionary: Love God and love your neighbor as yourself. Love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus was a psychologist. Oh, how we love ourselves ! and Jesus intimately connected these. Do you want to know how much you love God? How much do you love your neighbor? You love God no more, no less. But the young man questioning Jesus doesn't really grasp the tremendous implication of this if lived out. Instead, he comes back with another speculative question: ' Who is my neighbor'.

So here Jesus has fun because the Jews for some time had despised and excluded virtually every one but themselves from God's flock. So he tells a story: Jerusalem and Jericho were 20 miles apart – but what a 20 miles. You would have to go from Jerusalem (2300 ft above sea level) to Jericho (1300 ft below sea level) through some of the roughest terrain in the world- a drop of 3600 feet. This was the country of muggers and killers- not unlike Detroit and New York. In the 5th century St Jerome called this ' the Bloody Way'. So look at the characters involved in the tale Jesus tells: a) the traveler- a real schlepp (a simpleton weak in the head) he travels alone in dangerous territory. He's asking for it, right? Then (b) the Levite comes by and says look at that poor wretch off to the side of the road- maybe it's a setup. So safety first- and the Levite moves on. (C) the priest hurrying to the Temple in Jerusalem to perform sacrifices – now this looked like a dead man to him. If I touch him, I'm unclean for 7 days- that would put me behind in my work in the Temple. He puts the things of 'Religion' above the needs of people. (d) Then comes the Samaritan- the outsider- the despised heretic. There is an old saying- better to have a death in the family than a Samaritan knocking at your door. But he wasn't all bad- when they got to the hotel, notice that his money was good, no matter- he was prepared to help a poor wretch who had been beaten up and left for dead. Perhaps we all need to feel in need, a little excluded, out-of-it- to feel the needs of others. In the end, the Samaritan had the love of God in his heart

Let's summarize the message of Jesus- Christ would have us help another person even if he's a schlepp who brings his own troubles on himself. Our neighbor is any person from any nation and our acceptance and love of them must be as encompassing as the love of God. We are not called to cultivate simply 'feelings' of compassion- but deeds. Because Jesus says ' go and do the same ';. Being a good Catholic means doing- not debating. The result: and then ' you will live '- you will have a long life on the land- what every Jew wanted- prosperity, flocks, peace, joy- every good thing only God can give. The catch here in the story of the Good Samaritan- don't just know it- carry it out.