Homily for 15th Sunday 2016  
July 10, 2016  
Readings: Deut. 30:10-14, Ps. 69, Col. 1:15-20, L. 10:25-37  
Place: St. Peter’s  
Theme: Good Samaritan  
Mood: Instructional and light  

The Good Samaritan. The Catholic Church’s cycle of Sunday liturgical readings allows us to hear the entire Bible including this famous parable every three years.

I want to say a few words about the geographical region of Samaria, share a personal experience with a Good Samaritan, and offer a reflection about Jesus’ treatment of the despised Samaritans.

Samaria lies in the central region of Israel. In the southern region of Judah is located the city of Jerusalem. In the northern region of Galilee lie the cities of Nazareth and Capernaum. In the middle of the country of Israel lies Samaria. For a thousand years before Christ’s birth, the Jews and Samaritans hated each other; Samaritans were non-Jews. Initially they were native Canaanites when in 1,000 BC, King David united all three regions. Eventually, every couple of hundreds of years, the Samaritans suffered military defeat at the hands of the invading Assyrians, Persians and Greeks. Since the eighth century BC, Jewish prophets called for the destruction of Samaria: the prophets Amos, Isaiah, Hosea and Micah. In Jesus’ time, there were three main north-south routes between Galilee and Judah: the Mediterranean coastal highway, the middle mountain range, and the Jordan River route. All these routes passed through Samaria, where Jewish travelers put their lives and property at risk. Even when Jesus was passing through, the Samaritans refused him hospitality, for which insult the apostles wanted to attack them (Lk. 9.52), but Jesus reprimanded them for their anger. Even myself years ago, when I led a tour to the Holy Land, at our tour bus with Jerusalem license plates was passing through Samaria, Samaritans threw rocks and stones at us.

Along with the political animosity, burned a religious animosity. The Samaritans, not only had intermarried with foreign conquerors but also worshiped their foreign gods. Jews regarded the Samaritans as not true Israelites; they were regarded as half-breeds, worse than pagans.

Personal story. I know a Good Samaritan, now deceased. She lived as a next-next door neighbor on the block where I grew up in South Jersey. My dad worked a couple of jobs as an accountant. My mother stayed home raising nine children, until the youngest ones went to elementary school. This Good Samaritan woman, whose name was Gladys, was married with a son and daughter, who were the ages of my siblings and myself. Gladys was forever helping my mother. In preparation for Easter, she would take three O’Malley children at a time on a bus to a neighboring town to buy Easter clothing. In preparation for Christmas she would help Santa Claus by providing for and accumulating gifts in her home. Up and down the street between our two houses went not just bowls of sugar, but bottles of milk, clothing and furniture. Gladys’ family owned a set of the World Book Encyclopedia, and she would get angry
at her children because the O'Malley children used it more than her own children. My dad and mom never cussed. They went to Mass ever Sunday. And we prayed the family rosary every night on our knees in the living room in the months of May and October. Meanwhile Gladys cussed like a sailor, drank like a fish, and never went to any church. Her claim to religiosity was that her cat repeatedly had large litters of kittens, so Gladys joked that although she had been baptized Methodist, she had a Catholic cat. Gladys was constantly doing good for the O'Malley's. She was a fun-loving, big-hearted woman. She is my personal example of a Good Samaritan, whom I suspect has a high place in heaven. She certainly fulfills the criteria of judgment as listed in Mt. 25: “when I was hungry, did you give me to eat; when I was sick, did you visit me; when I was naked, did you clothe me?”

A point to ponder. Why did Jesus repeatedly present the hated Samaritans in a very positive light? ... Jesus provides three incidents about Samaritans. We just heard in today’s gospel the story of the Good Samaritan. We know too the story of the Samaritan women at the well with whom Jesus conversed (4.20), even though Jews were not supposed to speak with Samaritans, and certainly not a man with a woman. Jesus asked for a cup of water, and promised that in return he would give her waters which would “provide eternal life.” (Jn. 4.14) This woman converted and brought many townspeople with her to follow Jesus. And we know the parable of the ten men suffering with leprosy. Jesus healed all ten, but only one returned to thank Jesus. Jesus says, “Were not all ten healed, where are the other nine? Was there no one to return and give thanks except this Samaritan?” (Lk. 17.16)

Why does Jesus highlight as exemplars of kindness, repentance and gratitude these Samaritans, whom the Jews despised? ... Maybe Jesus wanted to demonstrate the importance of looking beyond the external differences of ethnicity and religion, in order to see the inherent goodness in every person. And Jesus certainly wants us to “go and do the same.”