

WHY MAKE IT COMPLICATED

This Sunday's Gospel is that well known parable entitled the "Good Samaritan" It is one of those stories of Christ which has endured down through the ages and will continue to do so until the end of time. It touches on the noblest of human virtues, that of going out of one's way to help a fellow human being, regardless of race, color, education, etc. It recognizes that everyone has a common ancestry and a common bond. Yet it is a great mystery how so many otherwise good people can simply turn the other way, rationalizing their reasons to the nth degree. Every Catholic, indeed, every Christian has heard innumerable sermons and homilies on this parable which somehow never loses its ability to touch the human heart. At the same time it is remarkable just how the message of the parable never quite really makes contact with the human soul in so many who have listened to it numerous times over the years. This certainly demonstrates very clearly the effects of original sin and a fallen human nature. It should also show even more clearly just how much one needs the Lord in their lives.

But in this Sunday's Mass, it is the first reading taken from the book of Deuteronomy which itself carries a most important teaching for every believer. It is the story, or perhaps better the end of a sermon given by Moses to the people after he has summed up the Law given to them by God himself, a law which if followed will make of them a truly great nation as he had promised to Abraham several thousand years earlier. Moses has come to the end of his journey. He has led the promised people to the edge of the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey. Not far away are the Jordan river and the city of Jericho. It has been a long and arduous journey with more than its share of impossible problems, the most persistent of which was the rebellious nature of the chosen people. Not a day passed without some of them, and at times all of them bitterly complaining and wailing about the good times they had left back in Egypt, and how now they were hot, sweaty, hungry, tired, bored - you name it. And they would blame Moses for all of it. And Moses time and again would calm them down and quiet their fears and often he would complain to God how difficult it was to lead this cantankerous people. At one time when they were running out of water, Moses prayed and God directed him to lead the people to a certain rock; he was to strike the rock which would then give them a great abundance of water. But Moses who was a great man and a most special friend of God lost patience and struck the rock twice. God was not pleased with his most loyal and trustworthy leader and because of this he told Moses he himself would never enter the Promised Land. Moses very obediently accepted God's verdict, not once questioning God. Nothing could come between him and his God. His love and loyalty were beyond questioning.

In today's reading Moses is preparing to turn over his leadership to Joshua whom God has chosen to lead his people into the Promised Land. He is giving his final sermon, his final words. When finished God would lead Moses to the top of Mt. Nebo and from afar show him the entire Promised Land. Moses had now finished his God-given task which began so many years ago with his first encounter with God at the burning bush. Now God would bury Moses somewhere nearby - no one would ever know where. Moses never once wavered in his mission; he did his best. This last sermon is his final legacy to the people he loved. Would they now listen and follow his words? Or would they once again forget and revert to pagan ways? Moses tries to tell them that God's way is

really a very simple way. It is right there before their noses, not somewhere high in the sky where they cannot reach it. It is not across the seas where they cannot go. It is very close at hand, touchable! It is so close that many stumbled and missed the simple elegance of the message.

It was the same in the time of Christ. When someone asked Christ what one had to do to inherit eternal life, Christ answered with a question: "What does the law teach?" The man answered: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." "Do this and you will live."

Simple! For all too many, too simple! Many expect and want the answer to be so much more complicated! The fact is, that getting to Heaven is anything but complicated. It is man himself who makes it more than what Christ said. Christ showed it was really a willingness to live one's faith, to go out to others rather than to just think of one's self. Christ's answer involves action, not reflection. Christ's answer means getting involved, not just standing far off. Christ's answer ultimately means to follow him, to learn from him, to imitate him, and if needs be, to suffer with him.

All this comes down to the fact that Christ wants his followers to be truly human, the way God created all people to be, to be aware of others, to treat others with respect, to, in a word, be an active follower of Christ, a true Christian. That sounds like work to many, like interfering with one's life style a bit too much. There are a host of high sounding phrases covering up the divine truth, hiding the real person, the potential total image of God. Thus little is done; little is expected; little is felt. A smugness creeps in and through much rationalization, one's ego and one's faith is assuaged and even more important, one's conscience. The result is that one lives in their own self made world and misses out on the far greater picture of the real world outside them. The joy of life is tarnished, their faith is dimmed, their love of life begins to lose its glow. Will they be saved? No doubt, but what a life they then lead, a life according to their wishes, contrary to God's plan. Where has the joy gone?

Christ spoke a message to ordinary people, not just to the educated, the learned, the leaders, the priests. The mind and love of God is such that he can break barriers and reach all peoples while seeming to each person that he is interested only in them. No single person stands out as more important in his sight than another. Each person is totally important to him as a true son or daughter. In any large family, all the kids are important to the parents, equally important. So too with God. And never be fooled by his message seeming to be simple, perhaps even too simple, expecting it to be more learned and sophisticated. It is people who make it complicated, who read more into it than is there, who expect it to be more difficult than it is, to be more lofty or more fitting of God than God actually intended. The ability of man to misread, to misunderstand, to confuse to obfuscate rather than to simplify and clarify is simply constantly amazing.

When all is said and done, the message of Moses in that first reading is simple, direct and to the point. Keep it simple! No doubt Moses had a small tear in his eye for he knew his people and knew how they would seem to listen but didn't or would refuse and then very soon forget and slip into their former ways. That is really the whole story of most of the bible. God also knows this, but he never gives up, constantly trying to get through to his knuckleheads. And he does succeed. Never underestimate the power of divine love. It can and does ultimately conquer all people and times

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