



PORTSMOUTH ABBEY

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Dear Oblates and Friends of Portsmouth,

During the summer one of the gospels focused on the question posed of Jesus on the not so obvious question of *who is my neighbor*, of crucial importance since the whole of the Mosaic Law can be summed up in the two great commandments: love of God and love of neighbor. If we are not clear on this latter point, there is something seriously lacking in our fulfillment of the love of God. We have heard the parable of the Good Samaritan so often that it is hard to think of him as fictitious and a means of clarifying a key doctrine of Christianity and even of humanity, a truly universal teaching embracing all mankind.

In the first place, it is important to note where the focus lies: it is not on the victim and on how we should treat those in direst need, but rather on the definition of *neighbor* and the erroneous concept of those who observed the law, without appreciating its narrow limitations when confronted with the situation described in the parable: a man in danger of death from having been robbed, injured and left abandoned on the roadside. He is ignored by the official representatives of the Jewish religion for whom it would be contaminating to touch what could be a corpse, and therefore against their law. Only the Samaritan, a person looked down upon by the Jews as a foe and not much better than a pagan, one who was outside the Law; only is he the one to extend help on a rather lavish scale, dressing his wounds, putting him up at a nearby inn, and promising to return to pay for the cost for the further care of the victim.

Only the despised Samaritan has shown the compassion and love that is demanded of the true neighbor, to one in need and the only proper response to the law of humanity which is universal. And forever. Ironically, it was the Samaritan who had the correct answer to the question posed of what kind of behavior

constitutes a neighborly action; there was no dilemma for him, no delay in coming to the victim's aid. The lesson of the parable is clear, and the response cannot be questioned. All three parts the hearer can identify with.

We are the **victim** in need of the help of others. Too often we have been the **priest and the Levite**, uncaring, inconsiderate and unaware of our responsibility. But who we should be is the **Good Samaritan**, who represents **Jesus Himself** who acts toward fallen humanity in His role as redeemer. *Go and do likewise* is the word addressed to us as much as to the clever lawyer who prompted the parable in the Gospel according to Luke and who had to be taught the lesson of what **love of neighbor** involves in order to correct his own narrow concept based on the Jewish Law. We cannot love the God whom we cannot see, if we are blind to the neighbor with whom we are in touch and not confined by time or space, by people or nation. As the metaphysical poet, **John Donne**, expressed it in another context, we should "*Never ask for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee.*" (That is, for each one of us, since we are all diminished to some extent by the loss of another fellow human being, even if we were unaware of his existence).

THREE MARTYRED WOMEN

In 1970 forty English and Welsh martyrs were canonized by Pope Paul VI, having suffered for their faith under the Tudor monarchs, King Henry VIII and Queen Elizabeth. It was rare for women to be executed in penal times, the husband usually standing in for his wife and considered to be responsible for her behavior. This was not true of Margaret Clitherow, whose husband had lapsed from his Catholicism while she had been converted, taking her newfound faith so seriously that she made her house a center for masses and harboring priests as well as setting up a school for young children. It was a Belgian boy who was intimidated into revealing the hidden mass paraphernalia that caused Margaret's capture and death, a particularly painful form by being *pressed* by having heavy stones placed on a board as she lay on the floor until she was crushed. In this way her family did not have to testify against her, and both her sons, enrolled in her school, eventually became priests in Douai, the center for Catholics living in exile. Her husband had prospered by conforming to the Protestant cause, but never opposed her in the practice of her religion and sincerely loved her, praising her for being the best of mothers and wives. The house where she lived in the district of York known as the *Shambles* has become a memorial shrine in her honor, and a constant reminder of her courageous stance for the sake of conscience in the busy world of commerce and tourism surrounding this tiny enclave.

Ann Line, a widow whose husband was forced to live in exile in Douai, was found guilty of harboring itinerant priests and providing the necessities for celebrating mass in her house. In 1601, the year of her martyrdom at Tyburn in London, Shakespeare wrote "The Phoenix and the Turtle," an enigmatic poem in code, about this woman, her marriage and her husband's exile and the consequences for them of their conscientious stand for the practice of their faith. At her death by hanging, Father John Gerard, a Jesuit, describes her capture and death in his AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A HUNTED PRIEST, while a modern writer, Dom Bede Camm in his NINE MARTYR MONKS, gives an account of the grisly death by hanging, drawing and quartering of two priests who died with her, a Benedictine and a Jesuit. As a concession to their gender, women were not subject to the torture of being "drawn and quartered." Ann Line's last words expressed the wish that she could have entertained a thousand priests had she been able to, while Mark Barkworth, seeing that she was dead, "reverently kissed the edge of her robe and her hand as she hung on the gallows, exclaiming: *Ah, Sister, thou has got the start of us, but we will follow thee as quickly as we may*, and resumed singing a hymn," perhaps set to music by William Byrd, alluded to in the first line of this poem on a spiritualized concept of marriage. ("Let the bird of loudest lay.") *The Phoenix and the Turtle* abounds in allusions to the "spiritual marriage of Ann Line and her husband" and the consequences for choosing the most extreme form of witnessing to their faith. This solution to a poem which has always defied explanation was first made public in the Times Literary Supplement in April 2003 by John Finnis and Patrick Martin, and seems to be a convincing theory as well as underlining the religious beliefs of Shakespeare himself.

Margaret Ward was the third woman to assist in the escape of a priest, a treasonable act and for which the gallows was the penalty. With considerable ingenuity she managed to visit a priest from Douai, William Watson, in Bridewell prison and procure for him a rope for his escape with the help of John Roche, an Irish boatman. Watson's escape was successful, but Roche was caught with others and executed with Margaret Ward at Tyburn in August 1588. Before her trial, she was cruelly tortured, the rope having been traced to her, by being chained, flogged, hung by the wrists with only the tips of her feet touching the ground, and held so long that she was crippled. She refused to save herself from further torture if she would not conform to the Protestant church nor would she ask for a pardon for what her conscience told her was the true faith. She cheerfully accompanied the five others to their execution.

LITURGICAL CALENDAR FOR SEPTEMBER

August

- 30 Feast of three holy women martyred for their faith: SS Margaret Clitherow, Anne Line & Margaret Ward

September

- 3 St. Gregory the Great, Pope and Doctor, Patronal Feast
- 4 **SUNDAY XXIII OF THE YEAR**
- 8 **Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary**
- 11 **SUNDAY XXIV OF THE YEAR**
- 13 St. John Chrysostom, Bishop & Doctor
- 14 **Exaltation of the Holy Cross**
- 15 **Our Lady of Sorrows**
- 17 St. Hildegard, Doctor (*Sybil of the Rhine*)
- 18 **SUNDAY XXV OF THE YEAR**
- 20 St. Andrew Kim and Korean Martyrs
- 21 St. Matthew, Apostle & Evangelist
- 23 St. Pius (Padre Pio) Priest, Stigmatist
- 24 Our Lady of Walsingham
- 25 **SUNDAY XXVI OF THE YEAR**
- 26 SS Cosmas and Damian, Martyrs
- 27 St. Vincent de Paul, Priest
- 28 St. Michael and All Angels
- 30 St. Jerome, Priest & Doctor



TYBURN GALLOWS (London)
Site of Execution of Catholic Martyrs



A Medieval Depiction of the Parable of The Good Samaritan.