

## HOMILY for 15<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year C

This Sunday's Gospel talks about how to inherit eternal life. As I reflect on that message, I'm reminded of this cute story that I'd like to share with you.

"Madame Fortune teller, tell me: Are there golf courses in Heaven?"

"I have good news, & I have bad news."

"What's the good news?"

"The good news is that the golf courses in Heaven are beautiful beyond anything you could imagine!"

"That's wonderful!"

"And you'll be teeing off at 8:30 tomorrow morning!"

Anyway, in my twenty-five years of being a priest, I've never had anyone come up to ask me the question that the lawyer did in this Sunday's Gospel. In fact, in my over fifty years of being a Catholic, I've never met someone who asks, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Many Christians nowadays would rather talk about political & social issues than discussing about eternal life & faith matters. That's why we've seen all sorts of political fights & endless bickering over various social issues. Perhaps the first spiritual lesson that this Sunday's readings want to teach us is to focus on what matters the most for us in the long run. We should not waste our time & resources on worldly things like political & social issues. For, in the end, those issues will not matter at all. Rather, the eternal life is what matters the most.

Anyhow, we learn that someone came to Jesus & wanted to figure out how to achieve eternal life. But, it's not just somebody. To my surprise, a lawyer was interested in the eternal life. Most lawyers would focus on something else except eternal life. He also recognized Jesus to have the authority & knowledge about eternal life. He must have seen something special in Jesus that others did not. He probably heard lots of wonderful teachings from Jesus & saw Him perform all kinds of miracles for the people of God. That is why he sought out Jesus & wanted to know how he could enter the Kingdom of Heaven & enjoy the eternal life. Jesus asked him on his knowledge of spiritual & moral teachings. The lawyer responded that he would have to love God with all his heart & mind & love his neighbors as himself. Jesus praised him for giving Him the right answer & said, "You have answered correctly. Do this; & you shall live." So, if we want to inherit the eternal life after the current one, we must do the same thing & learn to love God & our neighbors in this life. That might be easily said, but it is hard for us to practice every day. That is why the eternal life is reserved only to the faithful ones who dared to live out God's Commandments.

However, the story of the lawyer & his wish to inherit the eternal life & enter Heaven did not end there. Evidently, he wanted to ask Jesus another question, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus certainly was glad to explain to the lawyer all about the idea of neighbor through the story of the Good Samaritan. In case you might not know, Jewish society back then had a very limited definition of neighbor & only considered someone a neighbor if he/she was Jewish. Like American society in the beginning, Jewish society was segregated from other ethnic groups. That's why we've heard how Jesus & His disciples often avoided any contact with Samaritans. In fact, some of Jesus's disciples were surprised to see Jesus talking with a Samaritan woman at the well on one hot afternoon. Anyway, the story of the Good Samaritan tells us that a poor Jewish fell victim to a terrible robbery. Tradition said that the road from

Jerusalem to Jericho was like our “Wild West” & was controlled by all kinds of gangs & robbers. The Jewish victim was beaten badly, stripped off everything, & left half-dead by the side of the road. A priest & a Levite went by the same road & chose to pass by the victim on the opposite side. Some scholars suggested that the reason for that was because the priest & the Levite were on their way to the Temple for worship & did not want to be contaminated with blood. That would keep them from qualifying for worship. Whatever the reason was, the most religious people of the Jewish society ignored the cry of a Jewish victim. Fortunately, a Samaritan stopped to help that victim & spent his own money to heal the stranger. Jesus asked the lawyer & us, “Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the man who fell in with the robbers?”

We are living in a time that is hard for us to figure out who our neighbor really is. People no longer treat one another with care & respect. With all the senseless shootings & endless fights around our country, I don’t know if the idea of neighbor still exists. People don’t seem to consider another human being their neighbor like they used to. We’ve seen people who are more willing to hurt & kill another person than reaching out to help a stranger like a Good Samaritan did. We’ve witnessed many Americans who would rather stick to their own positions on certain issues than reaching out to their neighbors to make compromises & try to build a peaceful community. We’ve watched our leaders who would rather agitate people & cause troubles than bringing healing to their neighbors & promoting harmony in their community. Indeed, I dare to say that all the current shootings would disappear if everyone would learn to care for their neighbors & act like the Good Samaritan. I assure you that our country would be more peaceful & prosperous if our leaders would learn to reach out to help another human being & behave like the Good Samaritan did every day.

My dear brothers & sisters, Jesus taught us a lot in this Sunday’s Gospel on how to enter the Kingdom of Heaven & achieve eternal life. More importantly, He showed us how to act as neighbors & be compassionate to one another as children of God. He hoped that we would imitate the example of the Good Samaritan & avoid the action of the two religious leaders as His disciples.