

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Hearing this familiar parable of The Good Samaritan on this weekend that we ponder the meaning of the terrible violence that is besieging our nation, from Dallas to Baton Rouge to Falcon Heights, Minnesota, the question of the scholar of the law, “Who is my neighbor?” must be part of our reflection.

In answer to the question, Jesus responds with the parable of the Good Samaritan, pointedly portraying the righteousness of the priest of the temple as an inadequate response to the plight of the wounded man and the holiness of the Levite as worse than useless. It is rather the mercy and compassion of the stranger, the outsider, the hated Samaritan who alone fulfills the dictate of the Law: “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, withal your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” He says, in effect, it is not merely enough to know the Law; it isn’t even enough to keep the Law; “to inherit eternal life”, you must effectively show your love for those in need, doing for them as you would do for yourself.

For the moment, we live in a relatively safe and secure place and have not really been touched by the violence that has erupted throughout our nation in this past week; nor the violence that is tearing apart many other parts of the world. We are, for the most part, passive observers, standing on the sidelines, watching the horror that unfolds around us. Yet the question remains for us, “Who is my neighbor?” or perhaps more essentially, “What is my response to what is happening?” Is it the apathy of the righteous priest? Is it the unresponsiveness of the Levite hurrying to perform his rituals? Or is it a sense of responsibility to do something to bind up the wounds of our society?

Without assessing or assigning blame, which we cannot know, let’s look for a moment at the bare facts that led to terrible carnage. We do know that two African-American men, one in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and one in Falcon Heights, a suburb of St. Paul, Minnesota, were killed in altercations with police officers. These killings set off largely peaceful demonstrations in many cities throughout the country, until that fateful night in Dallas, where a deranged killer, who was African-American, gunned down 12 people, killing five police officers, wounding five others, and two civilians. As a result our nation is psychically wounded. Our hearts are bleeding for the victims and their families. We see our nation being torn apart by extremist voices blaring from every side.

Not wanting to give in to the apathy of the righteous or retreat to the emptiness of rituals, how might we respond as Good Samaritans to bind up the open, bleeding wounds that these events have brought forth? For your consideration, I would like to propose three possible responses:

First, let's not give in to those who would have us demonize the other. The vast majority of the people caught up in the vortex of this maelstrom are really, really good, but suffering, people. Those proclaiming that "Black Lives Matter" are not saying the lives of other people don't matter. They are protesting the fact that young, African-American males are more than twice as likely to be shot by police, and three times as likely to be imprisoned as white males are. They see and feel injustice being inflicted upon them, and the facts tend to bear out the truth of their complaint. These are people crying for their fathers and sons, brothers, nephews, and husbands. They want to be heard. They need to be heard.

Similarly, the vast majority of the police who serve our communities and serve our nation are dedicated public servants who really do seek to protect and serve. Theirs is a thankless job, fraught with danger each and every day. They should be honored for their service and respected for their dedication to the people whom they serve. Yet many of them experience disrespect and feel distrusted by those who are ready to pounce on their every misstep.

None of these people should be demonized. They are all good people who have experienced alienation within the larger community. This is the first step we who seek to be Good Samaritans need to take to bind up the wounds of our society. We need to resist demonizing the other and develop the means to welcome those who feel alienated into the warmth and love of our community.

With this second proposition, please don't cop out on me now and take on the apathy of the righteous, saying he's being political. Please hear this as a Gospel value. I propose it is the healing of this terrible wound of violence in this nation that requires the Good Samaritan to demand sane and sensible gun laws. I would suggest that those who facilely claim that it's not guns who kill people, it is people who kill people are not being completely honest. Large caliber guns that carry body-armor-piercing bullets have no place in the hands of civilians in a civilized society. Semi-automatic or automatic weapons have no place in the hands of civilians in a civilized society. Large magazines that carry thirty rounds of bullets have no place in the hands of civilians in a civilized society. If those kinds of weapons are needed to kill a defenseless animal, I would suggest the hunter ought to give up hunting and simply become a butcher. Or if the gun enthusiast needs such weaponry to hit a target, he or she really needs a seeing-eye dog.

The framers of the Constitution never had in mind these kinds of weapons when they wrote the Second Amendment. Further, in a nation that requires that every car be licensed, every drive be licensed; where every hunter and fisherman be licensed, where everyone who wants to get married must be licensed, why in God's name shouldn't every gun be licensed and every gun owner be required to be properly trained in its use, and licensed as such?

Finally, please take a look around the Church right now. Do you see what I see? I see a truth that Dr. King proclaimed more than fifty years ago, “Sunday morning is the most segregated time in America.” We have insulated ourselves from each other in this nation. We won’t even listen to each other. Democrats would prefer the power to go out before listening to Fox News. And Republicans are sure the commentators on MSNBC are wacko subversives. We may work with people of color or go to school with people of color or may even count among our families or friends people of color, the truth is we largely see people of color as “other”. How many here have ever met a Muslim? How many have ever prayed with a Jew? How many have ever shared a meal in an African-American or Hispanic-American home? It is only when we start to see the “other”, not as “other”, but as part of myself, will we fulfill the Law of loving my neighbor as myself.

In one of the discussions I listened to on T.V. or radio this week, it was pointed out by one wise person that the work of healing this nation of its divisiveness could not be accomplished by the president whoever he or she is, or the Congress, or even by the entirety of government. He said the faith community will have to take up this work. It is the work of the Good Samaritan. That made so much sense to me. It is our job, those of us called to be Good Samaritans, neighbors to our wounded society, who must do this work.

Therefore, with the help of those of you who want to be Good Samaritans, I would like to begin conversations between ourselves and our neighbors whom we have allowed to become “other” in our lives—African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, Muslims, and Jewish people too. Talk about what divides us, but what unites us as well. I am convinced that these conversations will lead us to discover that there is much more that unites us than divides us. If you are interested in helping me develop such an outreach, please call the Rectory and give your name, number, and e-mail address to Mary Beth so that we can begin this work of the Good Samaritan in our parish.

Thank God, we have the blessing of our young people today who are showing us the way. The youth whom I will now introduce to you, with the adults accompanying them, are being sent out as missionaries today to bring the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to those in need. Those being sent by our Church Family of Our Lady of Consolation, accompanied by our prayers, as Good Samaritans, are: Jace Adams, Jarod Dagney, Corey Hodorovich, Adrianna McCaw, Camilo Molina, Kate Rohrer, James Tygielski, Robbie Urban, Mary Trzos, and Paul Trzos. Accompanying our youth are: Janice and Joe Dagney, Sandy Hodorovich, and Tammy Tygielski. Please pray for them and thank God for them.